

ATTENDANCE CENTRES

**JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY OF ALBERTA
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Attendance centre programs, which provide an alternative to incarceration, were first established in the 1950s in England. These early centres specifically targeted youth, and were found to be successful at reducing recidivism. The first youth attendance centres in Canada appeared in the 1970s and have, in general, been able to reduce costs and promote rehabilitation and reintegration of young offenders. The Youth Criminal Justice Act, which is expected to be enacted in 2001, calls for a reduction in custody for non-violent offenders; as a result, a number of attendance centre pilot projects for youths have been established to facilitate the use of some new sentence options provided by the legislation. Adult attendance centres were first established in the 1970s in England and can be found today in Canada and the United States as well. These facilities provide supervision and programming to a wide range of offenders.

A review of the attendance centre literature reveals that such facilities can improve offenders' chances for success within the community, while achieving a cost-saving for the corrections system. Studies have shown that attendance centres can be effective in dealing with offenders who require intensive supervision and treatment. Research has also shown that low-risk offenders benefit from attendance centre participation as well; however, offenders in the low-risk category are unlikely to recidivate with or without intensive supervision. Attendance centres are run at a fraction of the cost per person than are prisons or half-way houses, as offenders live at home and spend the day several times a week at the centre.

There are a number of issues that make any discussion of community-based alternatives to incarceration difficult. First, the terminology used to describe various community programs is confusing. For instance, the term 'attendance centre' may refer to a facility offering supervision and specialized programs for offenders on probation in one community, or to a centre targeting offenders on house arrest in another area. To complicate the matter further, correctional facilities and programs that are basically the same in terms of their function and target population are given different names in different countries. An attendance centre, which is a Canadian term, is called a day reporting centre in the United States or a day centre in the United Kingdom.

Another issue that is problematic in the alternatives to custody debate is the need for offender consent to treatment. Often, when an offender is required to attend an attendance centre, he or she must participate in programming offered by the centre, or face returning to jail. Some argue that this approach makes the programming offered less meaningful to the offender, and therefore, less effective. Others point to research that shows that rehabilitative programs can have beneficial results in individuals who initially resisted treatment.

Additionally, some confusion is raised when determining the effectiveness of community-based programs. Typically, recidivism rates are used to measure program success, while other measures are overlooked. Most studies do not look at an offender's employment status or educational achievement after participation in an attendance centre program, both indicators of rehabilitation and successful reintegration.

Perhaps the most important issue that continually resurfaces in the discussion of attendance centres and other community-based alternatives to incarceration is the net widening phenomenon. The 'net' of the corrections system is widened when enthusiasm for a new penal measure is so great that it is used for a large number of offenders. In terms of community-based alternatives, when a new penal measure is introduced to reduce the use of custody, it is targeted toward high-risk offenders, but enthusiasm for the new sentence leads judges to apply it to offenders who would have otherwise been given a lighter sentence, such as probation, a fine or community service.

Net widening is a serious concern in both the adult and youth criminal justice systems. Attendance centres for youths and adults provide supervision and treatment for individuals on pre-trial release, probation, and temporary absences from prison, in addition to those who are custody-bound. Because attendance centres are being utilized for a wide range of offenders, from high-risk individuals who would have been placed in custody, to those who pose a much lower risk, some judges may be wary of using attendance centres as an alternative to custody. After all, if a prison term is the only appropriate disposition for a particular offender, why should a judge hand down a sentence that will result in the offender receiving the same amount of interference as other offenders given theoretically less severe sentences such as probation? There is evidence that net widening has occurred for adult offenders in Canada since the introduction of the conditional sentence of imprisonment which allows custody-bound offenders to serve their prison sentence in the community under strict conditions. In the four years following the introduction of the sentence, the proportion of offenders sentenced to custody has increased. Further, studies show that offenders given the conditional sentence are similar in terms of the offence committed and prior criminal convictions to offenders typically given probation, *not* custody.

When the Youth Criminal Justice Act is passed, it is possible that similar net widening will occur in the youth system as well. There are four sentences that can include attendance centre participation: probation, deferred custody and supervision, intensive support and supervision, and an order to attend a facility offering an approved program. Judges may be less likely to spare a youth from custody by handing down a deferred custody and supervision sentence if the youth will receive the same degree of supervision and programming as young offenders given probation, who are presumably lower-risk. Instead, what might happen is that low-risk offenders that could be dealt with using less restrictive measures could be given sentences requiring attendance centre participation.

To effectively reduce the use of custody in Canada, attendance centres and other community-based programs must provide a realistic alternative to custody. The purpose and target offender population must be redefined so that higher risk custody-bound offenders and not low-risk probationers are given supervision and programming. By offering so many services for many risk groups, attendance centres are currently trying to be all things for all offenders. More research to determine the effectiveness of offenders in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders after attendance centre participation might help convince the Canadian judiciary that attendance centres can provide a true alternative to custody. Finally, evidence of net widening must be noted by the judiciary, Parliamentarians, and all those involved with the justice process. Custody rates can be reduced, but simply having community-based alternatives to custody is not enough. These alternatives must be used for offenders who would have been sent to prison, not those who would have receive a more lenient community sanction.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the need to promote alternatives to incarceration has become increasingly pressing. Canada's adult incarceration rate is currently one of the highest in the world (Solicitor General Canada, 1998), and we imprison more young people than any other industrialized nation (Chwialkowski, 2000). If a significant reduction in admissions to custodial facilities is to be achieved, alternatives to custody that can rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders must be utilized. The Canadian judiciary has been less than enthusiastic about handing down community-based dispositions, as non-custodial sanctions can be controversial. Many argue that offenders cannot be deterred from future criminality and punished for their current offences with 'lenient' community-based sentences. This paper will address this concern by assessing the effectiveness of attendance centres, one community alternative to imprisonment.

An attendance centre, for the purpose of this paper, is defined a non-residential, community facility to which offenders report frequently for supervision and treatment. In other countries, these facilities may be called day reporting centres or day centres. Attendance centres target a wide range of offenders; adults and youths on probation, pre-trial release, temporary absence from a correctional facility, and those who are serving intermittent sentences may be required to report to an attendance centre. Additionally, adults serving conditional sentences of imprisonment in the community and those under house arrest may participate in attendance centre programs. Individual centres do not typically include all of these types of offenders as participants: one attendance centre might offer services specifically targeted toward adults on temporary absence, for example, while another centre might offer supervision for offenders under house arrest. Therefore, the concept of an attendance centre is quite broad. An attendance centre program can serve as an additional community-based option for individuals who were not custody bound, or as an alternative to incarceration for offenders who would have otherwise received custody.

ATTENDANCE CENTRE PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

Attendance centres for young people vary considerably in terms of both organization and function. The first experimental attendance centre opened in 1950 in England, established as an alternative means for dealing with delinquent youth. The philosophical foundation of the attendance centre concept was that, in most cases, young people should not be incarcerated. By participating in an attendance centre program, a youth could remain in his or her natural setting while receiving treatment. In addition to being economical and efficient, attendance centres were thought to provide a more humane alternative to incarceration (McClintock, 1961).

In an early study of the effectiveness of attendance centres in England, the criminal records of over 1,000 young offenders were examined. The criterion for evaluating success was the extent to which the youths were able to avoid further convictions. After a two year follow-up period, the study concluded that for young offenders with a minimal criminal history, attendance centres were quite effective; however, for recidivists with two or more previous offences, the results were not as

encouraging (McClintock, 1961). This result is not surprising, as youths with few prior convictions are unlikely to recidivate (with or without attendance centre participation), while youths with more criminal convictions are generally at a much higher risk for recidivism.

Attendance centres in Canada also targeted young offenders, at least initially. One early attendance centre project was sponsored by the John Howard Society of Hamilton. The program began in 1973 with four explicit goals in mind:

1. the development of social skills,
2. the improvement of school performance,
3. the development of constructive leisure activities, and
4. the development of an understanding of the social system and its mores (Solicitor General of Canada, 1982, p. 22).

A study of the Hamilton Attendance Centre found that the majority of Hamilton residents agreed that the centre helped to alleviate the accelerating rate of delinquency within their community (Solicitor General of Canada, 1982). In 1982, the Hamilton Attendance Centre expanded to include a program for female offenders, and group programs for former graduates of the Centre and parents of young offenders. The Hamilton Attendance Centre is no longer operational, but components of the program are still offered to young offenders in the Hamilton area, including an aggression management course and a crime prevention program targeted at property offenders.

The Waterloo-Wellington Alternative to Custody Program, operated by the local John Howard Society, is a community-based program for young offenders that grew out of the attendance centre concept. An attendance centre had been operational in the Waterloo-Wellington area up until several years ago, offering participants 8 to 12 weeks of recreation and goal directed activities. Contrary to McClintock's (1961) finding mentioned previously, an evaluative study of the Waterloo attendance centre program revealed that it was the high-risk participants, namely those with long offence records, who received the greatest benefit from participation in the program (Brown, 1983). The Waterloo program was subsequently revamped to target those youths who could benefit most from high intensity services, and to provide a greater degree of educational, social and employment skills training. The Alternative to Custody program provides a community option for custody-bound youths, and has been recognized as such by many Ontario Youth Court judges. The John Howard Society collects participant recidivism data and intends to evaluate the program yearly on the basis of these data (John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington, personal communication, June 19, 2000). The Alternative to Custody program retains the organizational structure of the original attendance centre, but is now a more targeted program with a clearly defined purpose: to offer an alternative means for supervising and rehabilitating youth who would have been sent to custody.

With the immanent passing of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), which calls for alternatives to custody for non-dangerous young offenders, attendance centre pilot projects have been established

in Edmonton and Calgary. These two-month pilot projects have recently been extended to run into 2001, at which time the attendance centres may become permanent. Youths on pre-trial release, temporary absence from custody and those on probation can participate. Components of the attendance centres include intensive monitoring, addictions counselling, employment readiness, anger management and life skills programming (Alberta Justice, 2000). Under the YCJA, attendance centre participation can be ordered by the court as part of four different dispositions, these being probation, deferred custody and supervision, intensive support and supervision and attendance at a facility offering a program approved by the provincial director. It is expected that many additional youth attendance centres will be established across Canada to deal with the increased need for community-based supervision when the YCJA comes into force.

To summarize, while evaluative information on youth attendance centre programs is somewhat lacking, the studies that have been conducted show that attendance centre programs can have a positive impact on young offenders. Low-risk offenders may appear to benefit from participation, but they are not likely to recidivate no matter what sentence they receive, so are not really in need of the more intensive supervision and programming that attendance centres provide. High-risk offenders, on the other hand, can improve their chances for success in the community through attendance centre participation, as the study of the Waterloo-Wellington centre shows. Attendance centres are also a means for reducing costs within the youth justice system as long as they are utilized in place of more expensive measures, such as custody. Further, some research indicates that community perceptions of attendance centre programs for youths are generally positive, which is an encouraging finding. It is often argued that crime is a community problem that requires a community solution. However, if the community is not willing to accept programming for young offenders in their neighbourhoods, then the statement is meaningless. But, because public support for attendance centres has been shown to exist, community based solutions to crime have a good chance of success.

ADULT ATTENDANCE CENTRE PROGRAMS

In the early 1970s, two decades following the introduction of youth attendance centres in England, four adult attendance centres were established in that country. When the Criminal Justice Act was passed in 1982, courts were given the opportunity to sentence offenders to day centre programs (attendance centres) for up to 60 days (Mair & Nee, 1992). Since the Act was passed, the number of adult day centres in England has risen dramatically. It is estimated that between 80 and 100 day centres are in operation, most targeting offenders at high risk for recidivating. The ultimate goal of day centres in England is to provide a serious community alternative to incarceration for offenders in the 17 to 25 age range (Vass & Weston, 1990).

A number of evaluative studies of England's day centres have been conducted. The first major study of day centres, conducted by Mair (1988), found that there is wide variation in the level of efficiency, effectiveness and economy of day centres (cited in Vass & Weston, 1990). Later studies reveal that successful completion rates for day centres only average 69%, even though participants undergo a screening process (Vass & Weston, 1990). Further, day centre programs do not seem to have any

appreciable effect on recidivism rates, although the recidivism rates for day centres are neither better nor worse than for other penal measures. However, program participants do largely rate the day centre experience as a positive one.

A 1992 study by Mair and Nee sheds some light on these findings. They note that while recidivism rates for day centres are generally on par with recidivism rates for other measures, it must be remembered that the population of offenders recruited by day centres are at high risk for re-offending. They state that “it must be clearly recognized that in targeting young offenders at risk of custody, day centres are dealing with a group which is extremely prone to re-offend” (1992, p. 332). Further, there is wide variability in recidivism rates among day centre programs. For example, some day centres experience recidivism rates as high as 95%, while other day centres report much lower recidivism rates, often as low as 31% (Mair & Nee, 1992). The researchers attribute some of this variability to the differential characteristics of day centres throughout England. Indeed, “there were wide disparities among the centres in terms of such factors as the number and type of staff used, periods of opening, activities offered, styles of working, and types of offender accepted” (Mair, 1988, cited in Mair & Nee, 1992, p. 333). To put day centre graduate recidivism rates into perspective, they note that day centre graduates do not commit more serious offences upon re-offending. On the whole, it was found that England’s day centres are a qualified success; recidivism rates for participants in some programs could be improved, but on the whole, day centres provide an effective alternative to incarceration.

In the United States, adult attendance centres (called day reporting centres) first emerged in the mid-1980s as an extension of residential community treatment centres (“Day Reporting Centres Growing,” 1991). Day reporting centres opened in Massachusetts and Connecticut in 1986 and, as of 1994, there were 114 centres in 22 states (United States Department of Justice, 1997). These centres vary considerably in terms of programming offered and requirements for participation. Some programs deal with offenders released from correctional facilities while others target individuals on pre-trial release. Program duration ranges from 40 days to 9 months and most involve intensive supervision of clients; some even provide 24 hour electronic monitoring (United States Department of Justice, 1997).

Most of the day reporting centres in the United States established before 1992 are privately operated; newer centres are more likely to be run by non-profit or public agencies. In the United States, the most common reason for opening a day reporting centre is to reduce prison or jail overcrowding. Day reporting centres are also cost-effective: daily operating costs are as low as \$6.39 in South Carolina and are as high as \$27.00 in the state of Texas (Nieto, 1996). The operating costs of day reporting centres are approximately one third to one quarter of the cost that of halfway houses in the United States (“Day Reporting Centres Growing,” 1991).

Day reporting centre success rates vary considerably based on the kinds of offenders they serve. One program serving offenders who have successfully completed both a residential work release and a period of home confinement, reports an impressive 97% successful completion rate; programs which

recruit probation and parole violators have a success rate of about 50% ("Day Reporting Centres Growing," 1991). A 1998 study of 297 clients of a Utah day reporting centre made some encouraging findings. Recidivism was significantly reduced, with the lowest rates corresponding to the longest terms of participation in the day reporting program. It was also found that staff assessments of participants' success in the program were related to a reduction in drug and alcohol offences (Byrne, cited in Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, 1998). As a result of these findings, the Utah government is currently considering expanding the number of day reporting centres across the state.

The first Canadian attendance centre for adults opened in Toronto in May, 1987. It is operated by a for-profit corporation, and its purpose is to provide a level of supervision that is as intensive as day parole without the cost of nightly incarceration (Solicitor General of Alberta, 1987). The company saw a need for an attendance centre based on a projected increase in the use of early release. An increased rate of early release places extra demands on community supervision resources and involves offenders who require greater intervention than offered by conventional supervision, yet less intervention than those requiring the 24-hour supervision of a community residential centre. Staff monitor attendance and behaviour at the centre, but rehabilitation, not control, is the emphasis.

The Impaired Driver's Program in Alberta is another adult attendance centre program. This program is conducted under the auspices of the Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission. In this mandatory program for all offenders convicted of impaired driving, the focus is on changing attitudes through education. In Davidson's (1983) study of the Alberta Impaired Driver's Program, the results were generally quite favourable. For example, it was found that the attitudes of program participants toward drinking and driving improved after taking the course and many said they would refer others to the course. Unfortunately, behaviour change was not assessed in this study and, therefore, it is not known whether the course has any influence on subsequent behaviour.

In 1994, an attendance centre for adult offenders was established in Edmonton to provide rehabilitative programming and supervision for offenders on temporary release or under house arrest. After the implementation of the conditional sentence in 1996, the program was expanded to provide programming and supervision for offenders given conditional sentences. The Edmonton Attendance Centre provides offenders with substance abuse, anger management and employment preparation programming, and those who are unemployed are required to join a work crew until they are able to secure a job. Because the centre is non-residential, offenders spend evenings and weekends in their homes, but may still be subject to supervision at these times. When a participant is under house arrest, attendance centre employees make contact with him or her either by telephone or in person at least once per night. While no formal studies have been done to assess the effectiveness of the Edmonton Attendance Centre, breach rates appear to be low. In April 1997, an attendance centre based on the Edmonton model was opened in Calgary.

ISSUES

There are a number of issues which consistently plague the discussion of community alternatives to incarceration. The following are some of the most prevalent.

Terminology

The terminology of community alternatives to incarceration is often ambiguous and confusing. For example, there are day programs, day reporting centres, attendance centres, alternative to custody programs and so forth. Lauen (1985) makes an impassioned plea to correctional administrators, researchers and program evaluators alike to correct the lack of agreement of nomenclature in corrections. Similarly, Czajkoski (1984, p. 6) refers to the "intricate terminological manipulation surrounding juvenile justice." Clear and consistent use of terminology would, among other things, likely yield better program comparisons and evaluation results.

Choice in Program Participation

Another frequently cited issue is that of 'voluntariness' in community alternatives to incarceration (Jackson & Eckstedt, 1988). Although, by and large, the literature seems to favour voluntary client participation, there is some agreement that coerced involvement in programs may yield beneficial results regardless of the client's initial lack of motivation. This belief is reflected in the Criminal Code provisions for the conditional sentence of imprisonment: offenders given such a sentence may be compelled to attend a treatment program, perhaps at an attendance centre, whether they consent to such treatment or not. Failure to comply with a treatment order could result in the offender's incarceration.

Recidivism Rates and Successful Programs

A substantial number of studies examining attendance centres and other alternatives to incarceration use the rate of recidivism as the ultimate (and sometimes only) measure of program success. Undoubtedly, the rate of recidivism is an important variable, but it is only one of many. Fortunately, there seems to be a renewed emphasis on broadening the range of effectiveness criteria examined. Many attendance centres offer employment preparation and educational programs. An indicator that these programs are effective is the success rate of participants in finding a job or in passing their course work.

'Widening the Net'

An issue which cannot be overemphasized in the discussion of community alternatives to incarceration is the 'net widening' phenomenon. This occurs when enthusiasm for a program results in its use in cases where it is not required. Although usually inadvertent, the danger of widening the net of social control is pervasive. Referring to this danger, Czajkoski (1984) notes that the criminal justice system has a range of operations that are broad but not unlimited, and that it should not be allowed to usurp the roles of other social institutions. He warns that the integrity of the criminal justice system becomes blurred when it finds itself in so many areas alien to its philosophical purpose.

In the United States, the use of community-based alternatives to custody has led to “extensive net widening on the part of judges” (United States Department of Justice, 1997, p. 22).

In Canada, this seems to be the case as well. Since the introduction of the conditional sentence of imprisonment, which allows offenders to avoid custody by serving their prison sentences in the community under close supervision (perhaps by an attendance centre program), evidence of net widening has surfaced. Even though the conditional sentencing regime was formulated by Parliament with the intention that the sentence would be given exclusively to offenders for whom custody is the only appropriate disposition, there is some indication that conditional sentences are given to offenders who would *not* have been given a custodial disposition. Ontario judge David Cole has argued “many judges have seized on it as a convenient punishment for cases where jail terms seem too harsh but mere probation would likely be perceived as too soft” (cited by Makin, 1999).

DISCUSSION

In order to make decarceration a reality, a coherent sentencing policy is needed that endorses the use of community sanctions and a method of providing authoritative and unambiguous guidance on sentencing to judges. The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), which is expected to be enacted in 2001, hopefully will provide such a sentencing policy for young offenders. In the Preamble, it states that the Canadian youth criminal justice system should be one that “reserves its most serious intervention for the most serious crimes and reduces the over-reliance on incarceration for non-violent young persons.” Under the YCJA, any disposition given to a young person must be the least restrictive sentence available that is consistent with the following principles: the protection of society, holding the young person accountable for his behaviour, providing him with meaningful consequences and promoting his or her rehabilitation.

When the Youth Criminal Justice Act comes into force, attendance centre participation could potentially be a feature of four different sentences. Youths given probation, deferred custody and supervision, intensive support and supervision, and those ordered to attend a facility offering an approved program may all participate in attendance centre programs- in addition to youths on pre-trial release and temporary absences from custody. Even though these sentences are distinct, the outcomes for each could be the same, putting the principle of proportionality in sentencing in jeopardy unless every attendance centre develops programming specific to each type of sentence. Because a deferred custody disposition is intended to be more onerous than an attendance order, for example, youths given deferred custody should be subject to more intensive supervision and programming. These potential issues concerning proportionality lead us to question the appropriateness of attendance centre participation for young offenders on probation, in particular. Youths given probation are typically considered low-risk, and so are not in need of the intensive supervision that attendance centre programs provide. If low-risk youths continue to be sent to attendance centres for supervision, judges may become unwilling to sentence higher risk youths to these programs, even though high-risk youths are the group of young offenders who could benefit the most from the intensive supervision and programming that attendance centres provide. This is

because ordering a low-risk youth on probation and a high-risk youth given a deferred custody and supervision disposition, for example, to go to an attendance centre would violate the principle of proportionality. Judges may feel that a youth who commits a more serious crime should receive harsher treatment from the justice process, not a community-based disposition that is virtually the same as probation, and so the end result might be that high-risk youths will be given custody rather than community-based dispositions. Net widening would then occur in the youth criminal justice system as it has already in the adult system.

Recent data show that since the implementation of Bill C-41, which amended the sentencing provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada to include the conditional sentence of imprisonment for adult offenders, a significant degree of net widening has occurred. This new sentence was formulated with the intention that its use would reduce our nation's incarceration rate by providing a community-based sentence to offenders for whom prison is the only appropriate sentence. While this sounds contradictory, Parliament did not want judges to hand down conditional sentences to offenders who would be likely to receive other non-custodial measures, as this would have no beneficial impact on lowering admissions to custody. Incarceration data collected by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, however, show that in most provinces the use of incarceration has either increased or remained the same since the implementation of the conditional sentence. This shows that having a sentencing option that allows for non-custodial measures is not sufficient, even when community-based programs such as attendance centres are in place, to ensure that decarceration becomes a reality in this country. As Jackson and Eckstedt (1988) argue, "in order for these attendance programs to be viable sentence alternatives they must be recognized and accepted by the judiciary as such" (p. 32).

Part of the reason why judges are not convinced that attendance centres offer a realistic alternative to custody is that many types of offenders participate in similar attendance centre programs across Canada: those on pre-trial release, on temporary absences from correctional facilities, offenders serving conditional sentences of imprisonment and those on probation are all included as participants. It is not surprising that judges are hesitant to hand down community-based dispositions to custody-bound individuals if they would then receive the same programming and level of supervision as offenders on probation.

What can be done to convince Canadian judges that attendance centres *can* provide an alternative to custody for youths and adults involved in the criminal justice process? First and foremost, the purpose of attendance centres must be redefined. Currently, these programs are trying to be all things for all offenders. As mentioned previously, one attendance centre for youths, in Waterloo-Wellington, has redefined its mandate and now exclusively targets high-risk custody-bound youths, and is now fittingly called an 'alternative to custody' program. Other youth and adult attendance centres should follow suit by focussing on custody-bound and high-risk offenders, while programs for offenders on probation could be established and run separately. As long as a wide range of offenders are included in attendance centre programs, the courts will remain unenthusiastic about utilizing them as an alternative to incarceration.

Second, more research needs to be done to assess the effect that participation in attendance centre programming has on offenders' rehabilitation and reintegration. One measure would be, of course, the recidivism rate. If individuals who avoided custody recidivated less frequently than those sentenced to custody, then it would be in the best interest of the community to extend the use of attendance centre programs. However, other measures of success need to be taken into account as well to assess offender reintegration. Do attendance centre participants have higher rates of employment than incarcerated offenders after serving their sentences? Are attendance centres more effective than custodial facilities in terms of helping youths to return to school? Further research to answer these questions would allow for a more complete understanding of the effectiveness of attendance centres.

Finally, as a society, we must heighten our awareness of net widening within the criminal justice system. When community-based sanctions intended to reduce custody rates are introduced, there is the possibility that these measures will be used incorrectly by providing less serious offenders with more intrusive measures than they would have otherwise received. To ensure that attendance centre programs are not being used to provide more intense supervision to offenders of a lower risk category who can be effectively dealt with through other means, we must note any changes in custody rates in areas in which attendance centres are established in the future. Net widening is arguably the most pertinent issue in the decarceration debate, and cannot be ignored if it is to be prevented. Canada already spends a disproportionate amount of its financial resources incarcerating offenders. If the community is willing to accept alternatives, and if such alternatives exist, why should we continue this legacy of over-incarceration?

The ambiguous conception of what exactly an attendance centre is, the diversity of offenders who participate and the multitude of roles that attendance centres play in the justice process force the question of whether attendance centres are trying to be all things for all offenders. It may be the case that attendance centres are *not* being widely used as an alternative to custody, but instead as a means by which to more closely supervise offenders after release from custody and others serving a community-based sentence such as probation. A worrisome possibility is that, in Canada, many different types of offenders are ordered to participate in attendance centre programs simply because they exist. It seems that the more sanctions, correctional facilities, rehabilitation and treatment programs available to deal with offenders leads to a greater use of those sanctions, facilities and programs, leading to a greater proportion of offenders being formally dealt with by the justice system in ways that exceed those offenders' needs and risks that they pose.

The reality of the situation is that prison is an effective (and expensive) means for simply punishing offenders, but to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate people who commit crimes, community-based sanctions are preferable, as offenders are able to receive more focussed treatment while developing and maintaining an identity within the community. Very few offenders are so dangerous that the protection of the public requires that they be kept behind bars. For those who do not pose a significant threat to the community, but who require intensive supervision and programming, attendance centres may provide the most appropriate degree of intrusion into their liberty. Less

intrusive measures such as probation, fines and community service orders are sufficient to deal with low-risk offenders.

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