

**RAND**

*Intensive Community Supervision in Minnesota:  
A Dual Experiment in Prison Diversion and  
Enhanced Supervised Release*

*Executive Summary*

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*DRU-777/1-NIJ*

*May 1995*

*Prepared for the National Institute of Justice*

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## PREFACE

In 1990, the state of Minnesota enacted legislation to implement an intensive community supervision program. The primary goals for the program were to reduce prison crowding by diverting low-risk prisoners back to their communities and increase the surveillance of high-risk offenders exiting prison on supervised release (parole). The program was funded jointly by the Minnesota Office of Drug Policy, the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Minnesota Department of Corrections. The National Institute of Justice funded RAND to conduct an evaluation of the program.

This report contains the results of the RAND evaluation. The evaluation utilized a randomized field experiment. Two separate substudies were conducted: one investigated the "front door" Intensive Community Supervision (ICS) program that diverted prisoners into the community at the beginning of their prison terms; the other studied the "back door" Intensive Supervised Release (ISR) program, that provided enhanced supervision services for offenders just finishing their terms of confinement. Detailed information on individual offender backgrounds, services received, and one-year outcomes (including recidivism and social adjustment indicators) were collected for 300 program participants. The costs of the ICS and ISR programs and those of prison and routine supervised release were also estimated.

This study should be of interest to practitioners and policymakers who are concerned with developing intermediate sanctions -- punishments less severe than imprisonment, but more restrictive than routine probation. The Minnesota experience is of particular importance because it is the largest true prison diversion intensive supervision program that has been accompanied by a rigorous experimental evaluation design.

Other publications reporting on RAND's evaluations of intensive supervision programs implemented nationally include:

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- Turner, Susan, Joan Petersilia, and Elizabeth Piper Deschenes (1994). "The Implementation and Effectiveness of Drug Testing in Community Supervision: Results of an Experimental Evaluation. In Doris L. MacKenzie and Craig D. Uchida (Eds.) *Drugs and Crime: Evaluating Public Policy Initiatives*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was made possible by the efforts of many people and organizations. Our most sincere thanks go to officials in the Minnesota Department of Corrections and the Office of Adult Release, ICS/ISR staff, and institutional staff, particularly those in Stillwater, St. Cloud, and Shakopee, who participated in the design and implementation of the intensive community supervision program. We would also like to acknowledge the important contributions of the Office of Drug Policy, the Sentencing Guidelines Commission, and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension in providing support for this research.

Specifically we would like to thank the former Commissioner of Corrections, Orville Pung, and the current Commissioner of Corrections, Frank Wood, as well as the Deputy Director of Corrections, Richard T. Mulcrone; Dennis Doege, Alternative Programs Manager; Duane Erickson, Director of the Community Services Division; and Tom Lawson, former Director of the Support Unit for Community Corrections. In the Office of Adult Release, special thanks go to the director, Bob Harrell, Deputy Executive Officer; John Kuesel, former Deputy Executive Officer; Mark Thielen, former Director; Jim Bruton, and the Administrative Assistants, Ginny Tryggesseth and Colleen Youngquist. In Anoka County, we would like to extend our thanks to Jay Hancuch, the ICS Supervisor, and District Supervisor Jerry Keeville; ICS Agents, Kevin O'Reilly and Steve Tusa; and Supervisor, Tom Foster. Our appreciation goes to the ICS Supervisors, Russ Stricker and Tim Boraas, and ICS Agents of the Citizens' Council in Hennepin County, Kevin McCann, Richard Coleman, Mary Foote, Kevin Tucker, Rick Austin, John Neumann, and Coordinators Tracy Keller and Donna Futhey, along with the Hennepin County Office of Parole and Victim Services, Division Manager, Dennis Avery, Supervisor, Bob Elkins, and assistant Julie Johnson. In Ramsey County at ReEntry Services we would like to thank Director, Bruce McManus (former Deputy Commissioner); ICS Supervisor, Bruce Clenenden; and previous Supervisors, MaryAnn Schmitz and Tom Guthrie; ICS Agents, Joe Arvidson and Ken Jones; and Coordinator Laurie Rosas, along with the Ramsey County Department of Corrections

Supervisor, Tim Rourke and George Courchane in records. Our sincere appreciation goes to ICS Supervisor, Andy Doom, and ICS Agent Tom Kritzeck and former agent Bill Fair in St. Cloud District. In the Albert Lea District, we would like to thank ICS Supervisor, Bill Weber, along with ICS Agents Dick Allen (now in Bemidji county), Jeff Oney and Dan Raden. In Mankato and Shakopee Districts we extend our appreciation to ICS Supervisor Jim Sop; former ICS Supervisor, Jeffrey Peterson; Supervisor, Linda Aaberg (also former ICS Agent); and ICS Agents, Robert Sutter and Dennis Mead. We would like to acknowledge the efforts of ICS Supervisor, Sally Ruvelson in Washington County, along with ICS Agents Ron Wells, Mike Mastrian and Myron Johnson. Our appreciation goes to Warden LeRoy Siegel; former caseworker Mike Bissett at the St. Cloud Correctional Facility; Warden Robert Erickson; Supervisor, Tim Lanz, and former caseworker and ICS Agent Susan Opsahl at the Stillwater Correctional Facility; and to ICS Coordinators Maribell Morgan and Sue August at Shakopee. We would also like to thank Gene Larimore, Director of Research for the Department of Corrections, Bonnie Rodriguez and the other staff in the records department, and Neil Johnson at the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension.

This research effort was funded by the National Institute of Justice. We appreciate the efforts of Jan Smaby in the Minnesota Office of Drug Policy, Kate Speltz, formerly with the Minnesota Office of Drug Policy, Kathy Guthrie in the Minnesota State Planning Agency, and Debra Dailey, in the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission, in providing us with important information for the grant proposal and serving as members of an advisory board. Our appreciation is also extended to Michael Tonry and Todd Clear for serving as consultants on the advisory board. We are particularly grateful for the continued support of our grant monitor, Ed Zedlewski, who helped us obtain supplemental funding required for the 24-month follow-up of the ICS study participants.

We would also like to thank several colleagues at RAND for their assistance in various aspects of the project. Special thanks go to John Adams, Milinda Cush, Carolyn Kono, Ethel Lang, Kathy Rosenblatt, and Jim Tebow. We also thank Terry Fain for his assistance in the analysis of the Intensive Supervised Release program data. Acknowledgment must also be given to the RAND off-site consultants who abstracted information from files

maintained by the Minnesota Department of Correction and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension: Ronda Kerr, Rebecca Petersen, and Susan Thelen. Without their diligent efforts, we would not have the detailed offender information on which our analyses are based.





**INTENSIVE COMMUNITY SUPERVISION IN MINNESOTA: A  
DUAL EXPERIMENT IN PRISON DIVERSION AND ENHANCED  
SUPERVISED RELEASE**

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**SUMMARY**

**THE "NEW" INTENSIVE SUPERVISION PROGRAMS**

During the 1980s and 1990s as policymakers and criminologists focused on the development of intermediate sanctions, many jurisdictions established intensive supervision (ISP) programs. These programs are designed to satisfy goals that have long appeared mutually exclusive: reducing prison populations (and budgets), while at the same time protecting public safety and punishing offenders in a manner that does not trivialize their crimes. ISP programs allow offenders to remain in the community under strict surveillance, but usually require them to pay victim restitution, hold a job, submit to random urine and alcohol testing, and pay part of the cost of their supervision. In many jurisdictions ISP programs have been utilized as probation enhancements, providing more intensive surveillance and supervision to offenders sentenced to some form of community supervision. Relatively few jurisdictions have implemented prison-diversion ISP programs -- programs that divert offenders from prison sentences to terms of supervision in the community.

Both types of programs have the potential to alleviate prison crowding. Diversion programs directly reduce the numbers of admissions into prison. Enhancement programs impact prison populations in a more indirect way. If offenders are provided more services and surveillance in the community, one expects to reduce their return to criminal activity. By preventing crimes, ISP may reduce the future need for prison beds. Evidence to date suggests that while ISP programs continue to proliferate, they have not substantially reduced prison crowding. In fact, ISP programs designed as probation or parole enhancement result in increased prison crowding if the response to

technical violations is to revoke violators to prison (Petersilia and Turner, 1993).

Reasons for the lackluster results for prison diversion ISPs are many. In states where the intent of the ISP program was prison diversion, many of the participants either were not truly prison-bound or only a small number were found to be eligible. When given the choice of going to prison or returning to the community and participating in ISP twenty-five percent of eligible ISP offenders in Oregon selected to serve their prison term (Petersilia and Turner, 1990b). In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, judges and probation officers often overrode random assignment of offenders to prison or ISP (Petersilia and Turner, 1993). Thus, many questions still remain about the effectiveness of ISP as either a prison diversion or supervision enhancement program. In particular, little information exists as to how ISP programs work in jurisdictions with sentencing guidelines.

The present study was designed to fill this gap by implementing both a true prison-diversion and an enhanced supervision ISP program, which would be accompanied by a randomized field experiment to assess program costs and effects. Minnesota received funding from the Minnesota Office of Drug Policy and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to design and implement the Intensive Community Supervision (ICS) and Intensive Supervised Release (ISR) programs. RAND received a grant from the National Institute of Justice to evaluate both the ICS and ISR programs.

## **DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MINNESOTA'S INTENSIVE SUPERVISION PROGRAMS**

In 1990 the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission directed the Department of Corrections to establish an intensive supervision program. Unlike many other intensive probation programs, Minnesota's program was to be designed to deal exclusively with offenders with prison sentences, both those entering and those exiting prison. As such, Minnesota's intensive supervision program provides an intermediate dispositional alternative consistent with the philosophy of proportionate and gradually escalating sanctions that underlies a guidelines system. The primary motivations for the ICS/ISR programs were to: reduce prison crowding by diverting low-risk

prisoners back to their communities, and increase the surveillance of high-risk offenders on supervised release (parole).

The stated goals of the ICS/ISR program were to 1) to punish the offender; 2) to protect the safety of the public; 3) to facilitate employment of the offender during the intensive community supervision and afterward; 4) to require the payment of restitution ordered by the court to compensate the victims of the offender's crime.

### **Structure of the ICS/ISR Programs**

Minnesota's ICS/ISR programs provide for maximum community surveillance and supervision in a four-phase process which includes a lengthy period of home detention and close contact by specially trained agents with small caseloads. At the core of the ICS/ISR programs are mandatory work and/or training program participation.

During the first phase (about six months or one-half the presumptive sentence or time to sentence expiration), the offender is under house arrest and must remain in his/her approved residence during all hours except those where specific permission to leave (e.g., for work) has been granted. The offender has four face-to-face meetings per week with an ICS agent. He or she also must submit to random, weekly, unannounced drug and alcohol tests.

During the second phase (about four months), the offender has at least two face-to-face meetings per week with the ICS agent, is subject to twice-monthly drug tests, and is under a modified house arrest.

The third phase lasts for at least two months and subjects the offender to one face-to-face meeting with his ICS agent per week. Drug tests may be done at the discretion of the ICS agent, and the offender must live under a modified house arrest arrangement.

The fourth phase, which lasts until the supervised release for ICS cases and until sentence expiration for ISR cases, is the least onerous and requires two face-to-face meetings with the ICS agent per month, discretionary drug testing, and a curfew instead of house arrest.

At least 40 hours of work, job-search activity, education or training, or chemical dependency treatment is required during all four phases. The

legislation also provides that the ICS agent may use electronic surveillance to monitor the offender at any time during the phases.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EVALUATION**

The RAND evaluation was designed as a classic experiment, with subjects randomly assigned to the treatment (ICS or ISR program) and control (prison or regular supervised release) conditions. Each subject in the ISR study was tracked for a twelve-month follow-up period from the time of random assignment; those in the ICS study were followed for a period of 24 months. The evaluation began in October, 1990 and data collection continued until July, 1994.

### **Selection Criteria and Random Assignment Procedure**

The eligibility criteria for the both the ICS and ISR programs were established by the state legislature and implemented by the Office of Adult Release (OAR) within the Department of Corrections. Offenders were screened by the prison caseworkers according to established criteria.

For the ICS program, caseworkers screened inmates entering prison with a sentence of 27 months or less. For those judged eligible, the institution caseworker filled out the ICS information and informed the inmate of the opportunity to participate in the ICS program. For those indicating a willingness to be considered for ICS, a letter was sent for judge approval. Once deemed eligible for ICS, the Office of Adult Release phoned the field coordinator at RAND for random assignment to the ICS or control program. The RAND coordinator assigned offenders to either the experimental program (ICS) or the control program (prison) by consulting a predetermined random list of assignments. For those randomly assigned to ICS, the institutional caseworker was instructed to facilitate the release of the offender to the ICS agent. Those assigned to the control group were informed they would continue to serve their court-imposed prison term.

For the ISR program, institutional caseworkers reviewed the treatment plans of offenders who were scheduled to be released from prison within the next six months. An ISR information packet was filled out for those who met the eligibility criteria for a mandatory residential program and ICS agents were asked to confirm the acceptability of the

residential placement. The names of those inmates eligible for the ISR program were phoned in to RAND for random assignment. The same procedure for random assignment was used as in the ICS study.

### **Implementation of Random Assignment and Sample Size**

The random assignment procedure began in October 1990 and continued until June 1992. The final sample sizes were 124 in the ICS study and 176 in the ISR study. Several problems were encountered during the random assignment process, which resulted in these smaller-than-expected sample sizes. The first problem was the opposition of some judges to the release of inmates back to the community on the ICS program. Another problem was the amount of time required to obtain court approval for ICS. Other inmates refused to participate in the prison diversion program after the random assignment when they found they were eligible for work release. In some cases inmates were denied participation on ICS or ISR after random assignment when it was found that the inmates residence was unacceptable. And in some cases the program was full and could not accept clients who had been assigned to the experimental group (either ICS or ISR).

### **DATA COLLECTION**

Several data sources were used to collect information about the ICS program, including:

- Official record data collected at the individual level from DOC master files, agents' chronological files, and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, measuring services received and outcomes
- Contextual information regarding program implementation
- Criminal justice system cost data
- Personal interviews with offenders about the perception of the severity of sanctions

The data collection forms, coded by on-site RAND staff, recorded detailed information about the offender's background and criminal history, drug and alcohol use, and risk/needs information. The forms also recorded the intensity

and types of services he/she received once assigned to the study condition. For each month the offender was in the program, RAND staff recorded the number of times certain activities (e.g., face-to-face contacts, monitoring checks, drug testing, treatment program participation) were performed. For the evaluation of ICS, we recorded similar information for the offenders who stayed in prison, for example, what percent received treatment, participated in education programs, etc. To record time-at-risk information, the data collection forms included the dates each individual was placed on and removed from ICS or ISR, as well as the dates of entry into and release from jail or prison.

The outcome measures included both program costs and public safety as measured by recidivism, which was quantified in terms of new arrests, technical violations, and returns to prison. Program success was also measured in terms of the number of prison bed days utilized by ICS and ISR offenders. To assess criminal justice system costs we obtained the average costs for correctional supervision, jail, and prison from the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Each offender was then "billed" for each service he used during the follow-up period (e.g. days spent on supervision or in jail or prison).

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

The background information on the 124 cases referred to ICS and the 176 cases referred to ISR show no significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The offenders referred to ICS were primarily single males, average age 27, and the majority (70 percent) were white. Most of the offenders had a high school education, but more than half were unemployed at the time of the current arrest. These inmates averaged seven prior arrests and two prior probation terms; more than one third had served a prior prison term and about half had received prior drug treatment. The majority of offenders had been sentenced for a property crime, either theft or burglary; about one-third were entering prison as probation violators; and the average sentence length for the current conviction was 20 months.

The profile of the 176 inmates referred for the ISR program is somewhat different. The majority of offenders on ISR were white males and the average age of 30, as expected given mandated eligibility criteria, was somewhat older than those on ICS. Those on ISR had attained less

education; almost half had less than a high school education. However, they were more likely than those on ICS to have been employed at the time of arrest (about two-thirds). Offenders referred to ISR averaged over six prior arrests, as did the ICS group, and two prior jail terms, but had been convicted of more serious person offenses, including assault, robbery, and criminal sexual conduct.

## **FINDINGS**

Minnesota is the first state to have implemented an intensive community supervision program within the confines of a sentencing guidelines system. It is also the first state to use intensive supervision both as prison diversion (ICS) and enhanced parole supervision (ISR), with agent's caseloads reflecting the combination of both types of clients. Although the selection criteria and required length of program participation vary for the two types of clients, the program components were similar for both ICS and ISR. Minnesota's ICS/ISR program is unique in its combination of prison diversion and intensive supervision caseloads. This balance between supervision and surveillance is reflected in the staff perceptions of the goals and objectives of the ICS and ISR programs and definitions of measures of success. Staff tended to view ICS in terms of rehabilitating offenders and emphasize the goals of social adjustment. On the other hand, offenders on ISR were under more strict surveillance and staff emphasized accountability.

RAND's evaluation of Minnesota's intensive supervision program incorporated the design, implementation and outcomes of both the ICS and ISR programs into a field experiment. Our major research findings include:

### **Size of Eligibility Pool**

As we had found in our earlier evaluations of prison diversion ISPs in Oregon and Wisconsin, program implementation, in terms of the number of inmates accepted into a program, is greatly affected by the eligibility criteria and procedures used in the specific jurisdiction. In Minnesota, a substantial number of inmates were ineligible for the prison diversion program because they had a past record of threatening or assaultive behavior or were unable to meet the requirements of a suitable residential living situation. Furthermore, the referral process mandated that an inmate who volunteered

for the program meet not only the prison screening for DOC eligibility criteria, but also the required judge approval. And, when given the choice between remaining in prison and possibly getting work release, versus a tough prison diversion program, some inmates preferred to stay in prison. Both the strict eligibility criteria and complex referral process resulted in a smaller-than-anticipated ICS program size. However, because the Minnesota intensive supervision program included clients both on ICS and ISR, unlike the Oregon and Wisconsin programs, they were able to continue operating the intensive supervision program.

### **Program Implementation**

We found that the ICS/ISR programs were implemented almost as designed. The average number of face-to-face contacts was slightly lower than specified, a monthly rate of eight contacts rather than the average ten per month. The average number of alcohol or drug tests per month was actually greater than planned, slightly over four per month. The ICS/ISR programs were more intensive than regular supervision in both the number of face-to-face contacts and alcohol/drug tests, reflecting the high degree of surveillance and monitoring of clients.

Individuals on the ICS/ISR programs were generally held more accountable in terms of performance with the requirements of ICS/ISR. A significantly higher proportion of ICS and ISR clients spent time job seeking when they were not actually employed and individuals on ICS were also more likely to perform community services. ICS clients were somewhat less likely, however, to receive alcohol and drug counseling than individuals in the control group, although this difference was not statistically significant. Individuals on ISR were less likely to receive specialized sex offender therapy than offenders on routine supervised release.

### **Technical Violations and Arrests**

The intensive supervision of clients did result in somewhat higher rates of technical violations, for both ICS and ISR clients, as expected. However, the primary response to the violations was to restructure the conditions of supervision rather than revoke supervision, which helped in reducing prison bed days.



The number of technical violations and proportion of individuals with technical violations was higher for individuals in the experimental ICS program in comparison to the control group due largely to the fact that individuals in the control group were in prison for the majority of the twelve month follow-up and individuals on ICS were closely monitored.

Given the increased number of alcohol and drug tests in the ICS program it is not surprising that offenders on ICS had higher rates of technical violations for alcohol use than offenders in the control group. Because the substance use of individuals on regular supervised release was not monitored as closely, it is possible that the two groups did not actually differ on underlying alcohol and drug use and the observed differences only an artifact of increased testing and increased reporting.

On the other hand, there was no difference in technical violations for individuals on supervised release and those on ISR, which is in direct contrast to our earlier evaluation of ISP nationwide. It is also important to note that in comparison to studies of ISP in other jurisdictions, the findings in Minnesota suggest that there was no increase in state level incarceration due to higher rates of technical violations for those on ICS. These findings reflect the use of the restructure system and graduated sanctions in Minnesota. Clients who tested positive for drugs or alcohol were more likely to be arrested and detained in jail and restructured to more intensive conditions of ICS or to a treatment program rather than being revoked to prison.

The results of a twelve month follow-up of individuals showed similar rates of rearrest among those who were diverted from prison and those who remained in prison and those who were on ISR in comparison to routine supervised release. Almost one third of those on ICS were rearrested within the first 12 months (mostly for a property offense), and slightly over twenty percent were convicted, resulting in over fifty percent of those arrested returning to prison. About fifteen percent of those on ISR were rearrested during the twelve-month follow-up, more often for a person offense, but also for a property offense. Twelve percent of offenders were convicted of a new offense, resulting in over sixty percent returning to prison. However these rates for ICS and ISR clients were not significantly different from those for the control groups.

For ICS offenders, within the 24-month time frame, almost half of both groups (experimental and control) were arrested for a new offense and a quarter were returned to prison. Regardless of whether individuals serve time in prison for the original offense or whether they are diverted to intensive supervision, the recidivism rates were similar. This finding is similar to that found by Petersilia and Turner (1986) in their analysis of prison versus probation in California.

### **Impact on Costs**

The use of intensive community supervision can provide significant savings as a prison diversion program. But costs for enhanced supervision are more than double those for routine supervised release.

Our analysis of the cost-effectiveness of ICS in comparison to prison during the 24-month follow-up period showed that an average of \$5,000 was saved for every offender placed on ICS in lieu of serving the entire prison sentence. These savings might have been even greater if we had compared all offenders who were released on ICS to those who remained in prison.<sup>1</sup> The major cost differences were the reduced number of prison bed days and time on work release for those in the experimental group in comparison to those in the control group.

Although ICS appears to reduce costs primarily associated with prison, the potential impact on the prison system as a whole seems limited. During our study period, fewer than five percent of incoming prison admissions were deemed eligible and actually participated in ICS. ISR was more successful, reaching almost 15 percent in 1993.

### **Perceptions of Sanctions**

The results of our study of the perceptions of sanctions suggest that there are intermediate sanctions that equate, in terms of punitiveness, with prison. For example, offenders viewed one year in prison as "equivalent" in terms of severity to five years probation, one year jail, and three years

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<sup>1</sup>The evaluation compared offenders as randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups, rather than comparing the services or sanctions actually received. Thus, our estimates are diluted by approximately 30 percent of experimental ICS offenders who remained in prison.

intensive probation supervision. Offenders also judged one year spent in jail as equally punitive to one year spent in prison. There were many similarities, but also differences between inmates and staff in their rankings of sanction severity, although the two groups differed on their perceptions of the difficulty of complying with individual probation conditions; staff judged most probation conditions as harder to comply with than did offenders. These findings imply that at some level of intensity, both staff and inmates judge the newer intermediate sanctions as equally punitive to prison.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Other jurisdictions, particularly those states with a sentencing guidelines system, may seriously consider adopting the Minnesota prison diversion program model as an intermediate sanction. At this time we do not recommend separating the ICS program from the ISR program, since we did not study the independent effects of ICS and ISR. In fact, for Minnesota, it is important that both ICS and ISR programs be continued so that the caseloads of individual agents retain the mix of clients. We would recommend, however, that there be a continued emphasis on increasing the number of clients referred to ICS. The success of the ICS program as a prison diversion program and recent increases in the number of referrals to ICS appear to support our findings. However, the lack of differences between the experimental ISR and routine supervised release groups dampens our enthusiasm for a combined ICS/ISR program if the sole intent is to reduce prison admissions.

Perhaps further research comparing the characteristics of those individuals who were and were not successful on ICS and ISR will provide better information to judge the success of these programs. The results of our evaluation suggest that, as measured by the stated goals of the DOC and ICS staff, the ICS program successfully reduced the number of days in prison while the ISR program did not. In terms of the number of new arrests, both the ICS and ISR programs were no worse than the existing programs, which meets the expectation. But the number of arrests with new convictions was not significantly lower as expected. Technical violations were only significantly higher for those on ICS since the control group was still in prison and were not higher for those on ISR as had been expected. Nor were

there any significant differences in the responses to the technical violations. In sum, the evaluation provides somewhat mixed results, since the ICS and ISR outcomes did not meet all of the stated objectives. The major achievement of the Minnesota ICS/ISR program appears to be the success of the ICS program in reducing prison costs at no additional risk to public safety. However, as implemented during the time period of our evaluation, the costs of providing the ISR program seem to counterbalance the gains of the ICS success.

