

Workforce Development, FY13-15



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Executive Summary

Travis County's Workforce Development (WD) program assists individuals with a criminal history barrier to employment find work. For those who have been convicted of a crime, employment is an important part of reentry and reintegration. Past convictions can continue to impact employment opportunities many years after exiting incarceration and completing terms of community supervision.

WD pre-screens job seekers needing assistance and refers them to employers who will hire applicants who have been convicted of a crime. Between FY13 and FY15 (October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2015), 230 clients exited the program, of which 83% (192 of 230) found employment while taking part in the WD program. Of those finding work, 95% (182 of 192) maintained that employment for at least three months.

In a recidivism analysis, the 161 clients exiting WD in FY13 and FY14 were tracked for one year from their program start date. The analysis found that 16% (26 of 161) of the WD clients were arrested for a new charge during that time period. Half of the arrests of WD clients in the year following their entry into the program were for Misdemeanor C offenses, those which typically are punished by a fine only rather than jail time. The most frequently occurring offense type in this recidivism analysis was public intoxication.

Key Findings and Recommendations

- In FY15, 48% (33 of 69) of WD clients were referred to an outside organization to receive some type of vocational training that would make them eligible to be interviewed by an employer working with WD. Depending on community-based providers to deliver training can cause delays that are frustrating both for the employer and the future employee.
 - **Recommendation 1:** WD should explore whether some of this training could be provided in-house in order to expedite referrals to waiting employers.
- Public intoxication, the most frequently occurring offense among new offenses committed by WD clients, and other offenses related to substance use such as possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia make up a substantial portion of the arrests noted in the recidivism analysis.
 - **Recommendations 2:** Develop strategies to provide resources that address drug and alcohol use among WD clients.
- In FY15, more than half of the clients (55%, or 38 of 69) lacked their own means of transportation to and from work. Lack of transportation exacerbates other barriers to employment.
 - **Recommendation 3:** WD should provide 7-day bus passes for transportation when a client starts a new job.

Introduction

Having a criminal history presents a barrier to gaining employment that can last years or even decades after a person has last committed a crime. Employers may be reluctant to hire individuals who report a criminal history.¹ Often, applicants with a criminal history do not make it past the initial review of their application.² Criminal history may even be treated by some employers as a “negative credential,” a marker used to screen out potential applicants early in the job application process.³ Finding and maintaining employment is critical to the reintegration of former offenders.

Identifying a connection between post-release employment and reductions in recidivism is an emerging area of research for which there are not many well-designed studies.⁴ Studies of corrections-based programs and transitional job programs have shown that participants in these types of programs recidivate at lower rates than non-participants.⁵ While reducing recidivism is an important goal, helping individuals overcome a criminal history barrier to employment also has inherent value.

Recognizing the important role that employment plays in the reentry and reintegration of former offenders, Travis County has worked to connect individuals with employers both systematically and programmatically. In April 2008, Travis County modified its own employment application so that questions about criminal history were not asked in the initial candidate screening process. Six months after the County’s action, the City of Austin followed suit. Despite these improvements, there still existed a need to connect former offenders directly with employment opportunities in the private sector. In FY13, Travis County Justice Planning (Justice Planning) began its WD program.

Overview

All clients begin WD with an orientation called Road to Success (RTS), which Justice Planning initiated in February 2013. The orientation is open to anyone interested in participating in WD and is held at Travis County Community Education Services (CES). RTS informs prospective clients about opportunities and expectations for the program. Interested individuals are asked to make an appointment for an interview with a WD staff member and bring with them documentation they will need for their job search such as their resume, a letter of explanation for potential employers, any special conditions they may have through probation or parole, training certificates and/or letters of support. Examples of these documents are provided and discussed during RTS.

The interview allows WD staff to get a sense of how an individual might perform in an actual job interview. Staff assess clients for their employability, and if determined to be ready for employment,

¹ Holzer, Harry et al. (2003).

² Pager (2003).

³ Pager, Devah (2007).

⁴ Visher (2006).

⁵ Wilson et al. (1999); Wilson et al. (2000), Zweig et al. (2010).

WD gives the client a referral to a potential employer. WD staff offer assistance with interview preparation, but if a client presents a greater need, he or she may be referred to a program that provides vocational training or social services. After completing additional training, a client may return to WD and receive referrals to employers. If a client in good-standing with WD is not hired by an employer, he or she can return to WD for additional referrals. Some clients return to the program after they have gained additional skills and are looking to advance their careers.

Equally important to providing job-seekers with employment prospects, WD seeks out and recruits employers who will hire individuals with a criminal history. WD staff screens all clients for employability and only makes referrals to employment if they believe the client is employable in the position. The process of pre-screening applicants builds trust with employers and encourages their ongoing participation in the WD program.

Who Was Served?

Between FY13 and FY15, WD served 308 clients who had a criminal history barrier to finding employment. The WD program served between 121 and 147 clients per year in each of the three years reviewed in this report. This report examines the activity and outcomes of the 230 clients who exited the program during this timeframe.

Upon intake, WD staff collect criminal history information from community supervision officers, community-based case managers, and self-report so that they can make appropriate referrals to employers. Some employers participating in the program will hire individuals who have been convicted of a crime but exclude certain types of offenses. In FY13 the most frequently reported offense type was theft/fraud/forgery. In FY14 and FY15, the most frequently reported offense type was assaultive.

Figure 1: Percentage of Clients Reporting Certain Types of Offenses, FY13-FY15

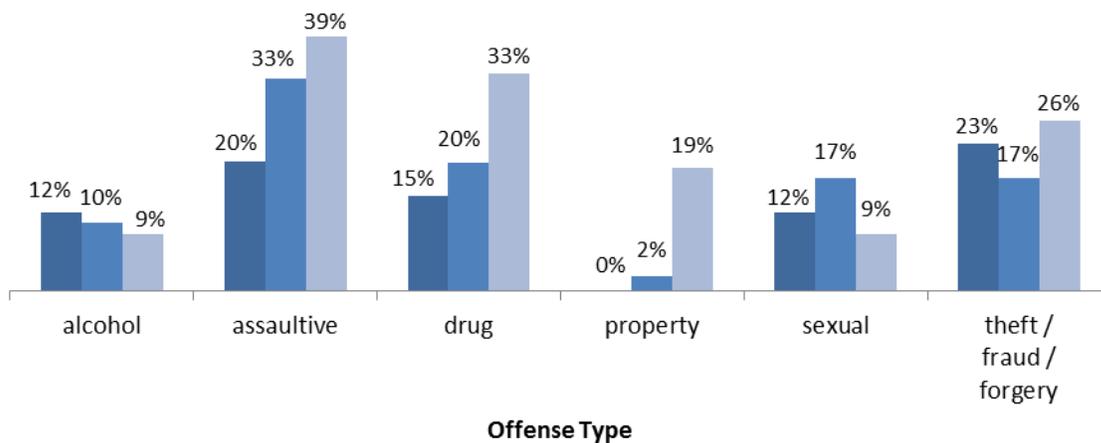
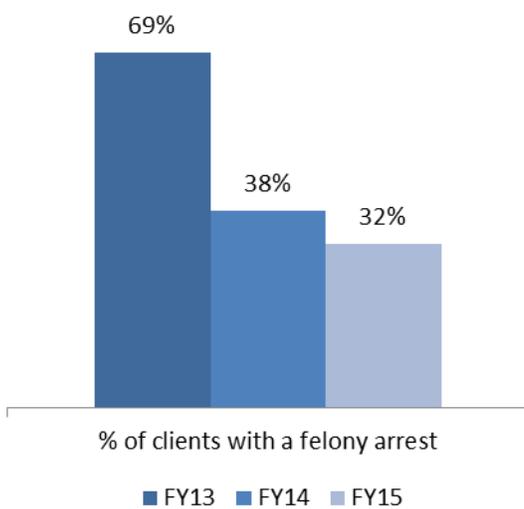


Figure 2: Percentage of clients with a felony arrest, FY13-FY15



■ FY13 ■ FY14 ■ FY15

Staff also track how many clients have a felony arrest on their record since some employers are willing to hire individuals with lower level arrests, but will exclude applicants with a felony arrest. In the first year of the program, 69% of clients reported a felony arrest. This trend shifted in FY14 and FY15 when about one-third of clients had a felony arrest (38% and 32%, respectively).

WD serves both individuals who are currently under criminal justice supervision as well as those who are not. For those under criminal justice supervision, participating in WD may be part of their conditions of supervision or a requirement of their supervising officer. About one-quarter of the WD clients are typically referred through the Travis County Adult Probation Department. The number of clients coming from

the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s Parole Division decreased in FY15, which corresponds to TDCJ placing a community-based reentry specialist in Travis County. In both FY13 and FY15, the largest source of clients came from individuals not on criminal justice supervision but who still faced a criminal history barrier in their search for employment.

Table 1: Supervision Type, FY13-FY15

	FY13		FY14		FY15		Total	
Office of Parental Representation	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	2	1%
TDCJ, Parole Division	17	23%	37	43%	16	23%	70	30%
Travis County Pretrial Services	3	4%	1	1%	6	9%	10	4%
Travis County Adult Probation	19	25%	19	22%	18	26%	56	24%
Not Currently Under Supervision	35	47%	26	30%	27	39%	88	38%
Unknown	1	1%	1	1%	2	3%	4	2%
Total	75	100%	86	100%	69	100%	230	100%

There are a number of factors that come into play when WD staff considers where to refer a client for a job interview. Some employers require applicants to have achieved a certain level of education in order to be considered for employment. The majority of clients have either a high school diploma or a GED. This group includes individuals who may have taken some college classes, but did not receive a degree.

Table 2: Highest Level of Education Achieved

	FY13		FY14		FY15		Total	
Did Not Complete High School/ GED	6	8%	5	6%	7	10%	18	8%
Completed High School or GED	38	51%	70	81%	56	81%	164	71%
Completed College Degree	11	15%	10	12%	6	9%	27	12%
Unknown	20	27%	1	1%	0	0%	21	9%
Total	75	100%	86	100%	69	100%	230	100%

Access to personal transportation is another important factor taken in the search for employment since some job sites are located in areas that are not served by public transportation. In other cases, some jobs may require shifts that start or end when public transportation is not in operation. In FY15, the most recent year for which data is available, more than half of the clients (55%, or 38 of 69) did not have their own means of transportation for traveling to and from work.

Some employers are interested in hiring veterans specifically. WD has a partnership with Travis County Health and Human Services, Veterans Services to serve veterans with a criminal history. WD also represents Travis County on the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services. The number of veterans entering the WD program has remained consistently 7% (16 of 230) between FY13 and FY15.

Demographics

WD staff collected information on age, race, and gender of all clients. On average, WD clients are in their early forties, with the oldest clients at or near retirement age.

Table 3: Age

	FY13		FY14		FY15		Total	
Average Age	44		41		42		42	
Youngest	19		21		22		19	
Oldest	69		66		66		69	
17-25	6	8%	6	7%	7	10%	19	8%
26-30	5	7%	10	12%	10	14%	25	11%
31-40	18	24%	24	28%	17	25%	59	26%
41-50	16	21%	18	21%	14	20%	48	21%
51+	24	32%	22	26%	20	29%	66	29%
Unknown	6	8%	6	7%	1	1%	13	6%
Total	75	100%	86	100%	69	100%	230	100%

As with most populations that have been involved with the criminal justice system, WD clients are predominantly male, but the percentage of clients who are female has risen each year of the program's operation.

The distribution of WD clients' race varies from year to year. Variations from year to year may in part be a result of outreach to specific communities around Travis County occurring in different fiscal years.

Figure 3: Gender of WD Clients

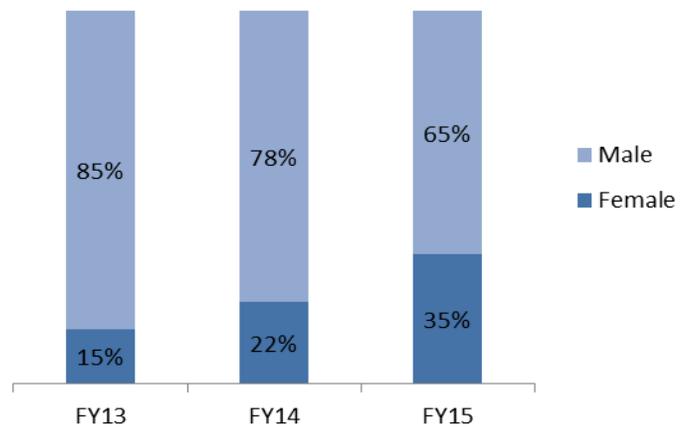


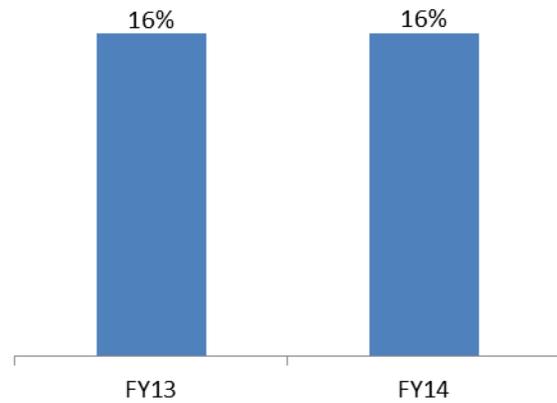
Table 4: Race/Ethnicity of WD Clients

	FY13		FY14		FY15		Total	
Black	18	24%	25	29%	34	49%	77	33%
Hispanic	22	29%	32	37%	16	23%	70	30%
White	15	20%	26	30%	17	25%	58	25%
Other	4	5%	2	2%	2	3%	8	3%
Unknown	16	21%	1	1%	0	0%	17	7%
Total	75	100%	86	100%	69	100%	230	100%

Recidivism

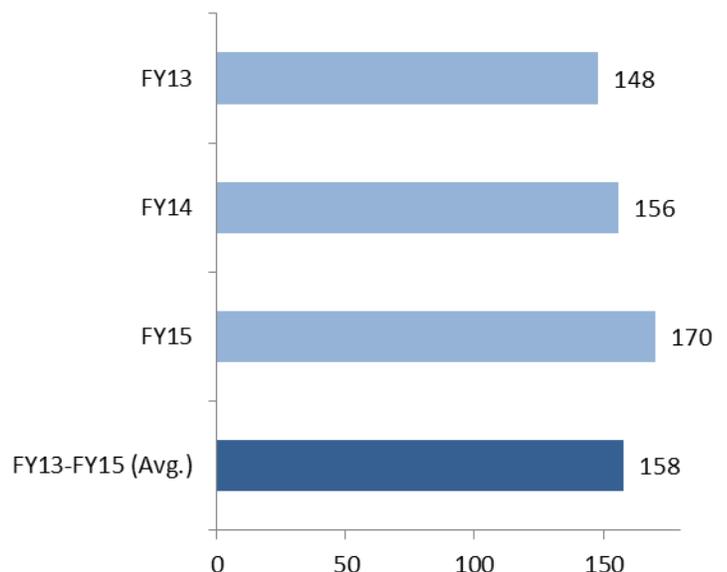
While the WD program was not specifically designed to reduce recidivism, the public has an interest in improving public safety by reducing the likelihood of re-arrest among individuals who have been involved in the criminal justice system. In addition to public safety concerns, employers also have an interest in assuring that their employees do not get re-arrested. This report examined Travis County arrest data to determine how many clients were re-arrested after engaging in services with WD. The recidivism analysis includes all clients who exited WD in FY13 and FY14 in order to ensure that full year from the start date had elapsed for each client. This study counted any arrest for a new charge that occurred within one year of starting WD. Overall, a small number of the WD clients were arrested within one year of starting the program (16% or 26 of 161). The recidivism rate remained constant during the two years included in the recidivism analysis.

Figure 4: Re-Arrested within One Year of Starting



Most of the offenses committed by WD clients were minor offenses. The 26 clients who were arrested had a cumulative total of 61 offenses for which they were arrested. More than half of the offenses (61% or 37 of 61) occurring within a year of starting WD were for Misdemeanor C offenses. The most frequently occurring offense type was for public intoxication. Many additional offenses also related to substance use include possession of drug paraphernalia and drug possession. Of the offenses for which WD clients were arrested within one year of starting the program, 48% (29 of 61) were related to drug or alcohol use or possession, including public intoxication. Please note that more than one offense can be related to a single arrest.

Figure 5: Length of Stay in WD (days)



Services Provided

Once a client has attended an orientation, he or she typically remains in contact with WD either personally or through the employer for up to six months. Most clients meet with WD staff between one and three times before exiting the program. Clients who are employment-ready may attend only one meeting before they are referred to job interviews with employers willing to hire them. The average length of time a client's case

remains open from intake to closure is between five and six months.

Some clients need additional supports to become employment-ready. WD staff refer clients to partner agencies in order to meet these needs. In FY15, 48% (33 of 69) of the WD clients were referred to an outside organization to receive some type of vocational training that would make them eligible to be interviewed by a WD employer. In FY15, four or 6% of the clients received a referral to a social service agency to address a barrier to employment or other need.

In addition to job seekers, WD staff also work with employers to best meet their needs. WD staff spend part of their time recruiting new employers and maintaining relationships with existing employers. When an employer needs to fill many positions quickly, WD staff host hiring events to introduce employers with pre-screened job applicants. Staff also organize job fairs that include multiple employers along with service providers. In FY15, WD staff sponsored four job fairs at which employers hired 160 individuals. Some individuals who were hired at WD job fairs were not WD clients, but rather came from community-based partners such as Goodwill, Workforce Solutions, or the Urban League.

Outcomes

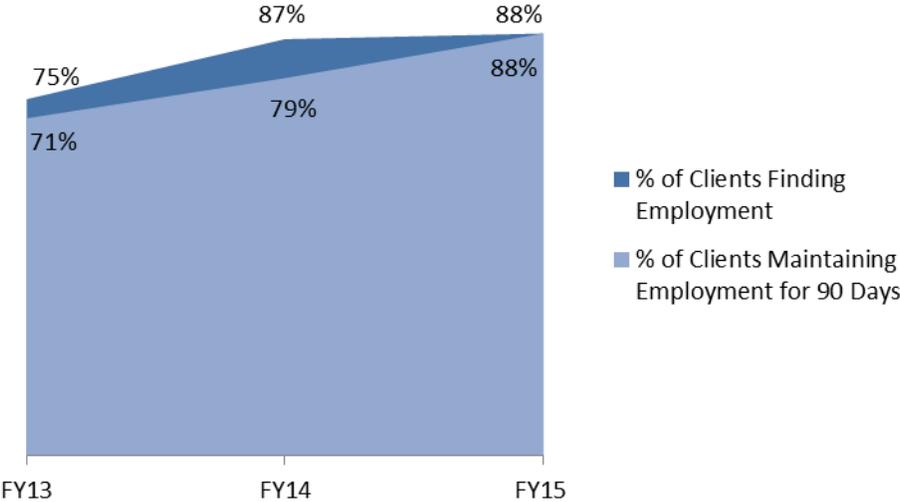
Most clients who enter the WD program successfully complete the terms of the program. Reasons for exiting prior to completion include non-compliance, withdrawing from the program, moving out of the area, and being arrested for a new crime. Non-compliance indicates the client did not follow through with an agreement with staff and withdrawing from the program indicates the client chose not to continue services.

Table 5: Exit Reason

	FY13		FY14		FY15		Total	
Completed	51	68%	68	79%	57	83%	176	77%
Did Not Complete	24	32%	18	21%	12	17%	54	23%
<i>Non-Compliance</i>	18	24%	14	16%	10	14%	42	18%
<i>Withdrew</i>	0	0%	3	3%	0	0%	3	1%
<i>Re-Arrested</i>	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	2	1%
<i>Moved</i>	4	5%	0	0%	0	0%	4	2%
<i>Other</i>	1	1%	0	0%	2	3%	3	1%
Total	75	100%	86	100%	69	100%	230	100%

The primary goal of the WD program is to help individuals with a criminal history barrier find and maintain employment. The WD program has achieved a high rate of connecting program participants with employers willing to hire them. Over the three-year period analyzed for this report between 75% and 88% of clients found a job each year while working with WD staff. Each year, between 71% and 88% maintained their job for at least 90 days. Of clients finding work through WD between FY13 and FY15, 95% (182 of 192) maintained the position for at least 90 days. On average, WD clients find jobs with a starting wage of about \$11.00 per hour.

Figure 6: Percentage of WD clients Finding and Maintaining Employment



Conclusion

WD connects Travis County residents who are having difficulty finding employment because of a criminal history barrier with employers who are interested in hiring them. WD does not exclude individuals by type of offense, but does screen in clients according to their readiness for employment. Over the three-year period of this study, about three-quarters of WD clients completed services, and a slightly higher percentage found a job during their engagement with WD. Of clients finding employment, 95% maintained the job for at least 90 days. About one-sixth (16% or 26 of 161) of the clients were re-arrested for a new charge after starting with WD. Arrests for drug and alcohol-related offenses made up 48% (29 of 61 arrests) analyzed by this study.

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Appendix 1. Data Sources: Definitions and Explanations

Workforce Development Program Database

The evaluation of the Workforce Development (WD) program draws on the WD database, which was built by Travis County Information Technology Services. The database captures information on individual clients, tracking their entry into and exit from the program, referrals to community resources, employment information, and other relevant data.

The Travis County Integrated Justice System (Tiburón)

The Travis County Integrated Justice System (Tiburón) is a series of data tables and databases used by many government agencies in the county for electronically storing administrative records. These data include records of most people arrested and booked in Travis County (except expungements). This study uses these data to examine the recidivism of the WD clients.

Analysis

As part of this evaluation, a “snapshot” of the data was taken and reviewed for data entry errors. After program staff updated the database with corrected information, a second, final “snapshot” was taken and prepared for analysis. The analysis is of cases exiting the program. An individual may appear in the dataset more than once if he or she left the program and returned at a later time. Information about services received was aggregated and connected back to each client’s individual record. The final evaluation data set was processed using SPSS to provide counts for specific measures.

Appendix 2. Recidivism Analysis Methodology

1. Locate WD clients to follow

This recidivism analysis selected all WD clients who exited the program in FY13 and FY14 (October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2014).

2. Identify the start date for the recidivism follow-up period

This study operationalized the recidivism follow-up period as the 365 day period starting on the day a person entered the WD program. The end date of the analysis, the last day of FY14, allows at least one full year (365 days) for the recidivism follow up period for all clients included in the study.

3. Screen WD clients for recidivism

The outcome evaluation examined whether WD clients were arrested and booked for any new offenses with a severity of Class C Misdemeanor and above. To conduct this recidivism screen, this study ran the 161 WD clients against all arrest and jail bookings (Tiburon) to see if there was a match on the MNI number.

The MNI number is a person-specific code that is assigned to a person when he first enters the Travis County Criminal Justice System. The unique MNI number makes it easy to see if the person has a subsequent arrest-booking event: the researcher simply searches the MNI field for the specific MNI to isolate the individual's arrest-booking history. Specific code values identify new arrest-bookings. It should be noted that MNI numbers were missing for some clients in the WD database. All records missing the MNI were looked up in Tiburon using name and date of birth. After performing a manual search about one-fifth of the clients in this analysis (33 of 161) did not have an identified MNI, indicating they did not have a history of arrests in Travis County. These cases were coded as having not recidivated.

4. Specific code values used to identify new arrest-bookings

This study operationalized new arrest and jail bookings using two variables in the Tiburon data. First, the Authority Code (Auth_Code) variable had to have at least one of three values: CCN (Community Court New Charge), CWART (taken into custody for a Class C Misdemeanor offense), or New (New Arrest). Second, the jail code (BJ_TYP_PRIS) for these charges had to have either CITY or CTY as a value. Finally, the booking date of the variable had to occur within 365 days of the client's start date with the WD program.

5. This recidivism analysis includes Class C Misdemeanors

In line with Justice Planning practices, re-arrests indicating "any arrest" reported include Class C misdemeanors.

