

Key Findings

- Despite the delayed launch of contracts, the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program has made steady progress toward participation targets in terms of the number of individuals served. The total unduplicated number of individuals served reached 777 at the end of July, compared to the year-end target of 900, with three months remaining in the contract. The service contracts and progress made since February are summarized by provider as follows:
 - Behavioral Interventions, Inc., (BI) is under contract to provide a program of 6 to 8 months duration serving 100 participants at each of its Lafayette and Shreveport sites by the end of the contract year. As of July 2004, BI had served 120 individual participants at the Lafayette site and 129 individual participants at the Shreveport site.
 - Church United for Community Development (CUCD) is under contract to provide a yearlong program serving 100 participants by the end of the contract year. As of July 2004, CUCD had served 116 individual participants.
 - Indigent Partial Hospitalization (IPH) is under contract to provide a 90-day program, which serves 175 participants by the end of the contract year. As of July 2004, IPH had served 66 individual participants.
 - Little Union Baptist Church (LUBC) is under contract to provide a year long program that serves 100 participants by the end of the contract year. As of July 2004, LUBC had served 141 individual participants.
 - Volunteers of America (VOA) is under contract to provide a 90-day program that serves 350 participants by the end of the contract year. As of July 2004, VOA had served 205 individual participants.
- Providers are given considerable flexibility in designing the details of their programs within the general scope of work. Consequently, actual program implementation differs significantly from provider to provider in terms of both service content and delivery method. Programs ranged from a highly structured and regimented program with emphasis on individual accountability, to a group-oriented program with strong support from staff and peers, to programs with faith-based approaches.

- Employment among participants improved during the course of their program participation. Overall, the employment rate increased about 7 percentage points from 30 to 37 percent between entry to and exit from the program. The quarterly earnings among those employed also increased from \$1,773 to \$2,148. The gain in employment was even larger—over 10 percentage points—among those who participated in the program over a 60 calendar day period.

Introduction

Under the State of Louisiana's TANF Initiatives Program, the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C) has received funding over the past three years to administer the Post-Release Skills Program, a re-entry program to provide services to recently released inmates from state prisons and parish jails who are parents of minor children. During the first two years of the TANF Initiatives, a total of \$7 million of TANF Initiatives funds (\$3 million in FFY2002 and \$4 million in FFY2003) were allocated on the Post-Release Skills Program. As BPA's previous reports documented, the TANF Initiatives-funded Post-Release Skills Program has evolved from one service contract with a scope of work that was not well defined in the first year to multiple service contracts with more explicit programmatic expectations in the second year.

In the third year (FFY2004) of the TANF Initiatives Program, the Louisiana State Legislature allocated \$4.5 million of funding to the Post-Release Skills Program Initiative. As in the second year of the program, DPS&C used a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process to select six contractors to provide services in five cities across Louisiana. Three of those contractors had been funded in the second year as well. While the contractors represented a wide range of organizational backgrounds and programmatic approaches, they were all expected to adhere to service requirements established by the DPS&C and to measure progress by common performance indicators.

Building on the previous evaluation efforts, the third year evaluation of the Post-Release Skills Program by Berkeley Policy Associates (BPA) is designed to (1) to document the challenges and progress in implementation with focus on differences by the provider type and (2) to gauge participant outcomes in terms of their employment and recidivism. The findings presented in this report are based on: program information collected from sites including daily participation logs tracked by providers; phone interviews and site visits with five providers;

Exhibit 1
Post-Release Skills Program Summary Table

Contract Agency:	Department of Public Safety and Corrections
Subcontractors:	Behavioral Interventions, Inc., Church United for Community Development, Indigent Partial Hospitalization, Little Union Baptist Church and Volunteers of America New Orleans
Grant Amount:	\$4,500,000 (for 10/1/03-9/30/04)
Expenditures To Date:	\$1,182,731.40 (as of 7/31/04)
Objectives:	Assist former inmates who are parents of minor children in making the transition to society.
Services:	Three to twelve month programs including substance abuse counseling, family counseling, GED test preparation and academic enhancement, conflict resolution training, anger management training, communication/relationship training, life skills training, parenting skills, child support counseling, job skills training and job placement assistance.
Initiative Locations:	Baton Rouge, Lafayette, New Orleans, Monroe and Shreveport
Target Population:	Former offenders who are parents of minor children.
Total Number of Participants To Date:	777 participants (as of 7/31/04)

focus groups with participants at three program sites; data analyses of participant data; and reviews of monthly reports, program documents, and literature.¹

¹ BPA staff conducted site visits to Behavioral Interventions, Inc. (Shreveport), Church United for Community Development (Baton Rouge), Indigent Partial Hospitalization (Monroe), Little Union Baptist Church (Shreveport) and Volunteers of America (New Orleans) in June 2004. During the visits, we interviewed program administrators and instructors. We also conducted focus groups with participants at Behavioral Interventions, Inc. (Shreveport), Little Union Baptist Church (Shreveport) and Volunteers of America (New Orleans). For our data analysis, we collected Year 2 participant information from BI and VOA and matched them with the Louisiana Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance records to assess employment outcomes and with the DPS&C's Corrections and Justice Unified Network (CAJUN) data to track recidivism.

Overview of the Program Design and Service Providers

Program Objective and Design Overview

The goal of the Post-Release Skills Program is to equip released former offenders who are parents of minor children with the educational, life, and job skills necessary to gain employment and provide financial and emotional support to their families. To meet this goal, service providers under the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program are required by DPS&C to offer a comprehensive set of services to meet a variety of participant needs. These required services include substance abuse counseling, family counseling, General Education Degree (GED) preparation and academic enhancement, conflict resolution and anger management training, communication and relationship skills training, parenting skills, assistance with child support obligations, job skills training, and job placement assistance.² Since the target clients are parents of minor children, the strengthening of family is a particular focus of the Program. All service providers are also required to develop collaborative partnerships with correctional facilities and local agencies in order to recruit participants and provide social service referrals. While the array of services characterizes the Program's holistic emphasis, both providers and DPS&C understand that the success of the Post-Release Skills Program is to be measured primarily in terms of employment among participants.

As noted in our previous report, no specific curriculum or therapeutic modality was identified to guarantee successful reintegration of former offenders into society. However, existing research suggests that effective re-entry programs incorporate a common set of principles in their program design, including:

- Targeting needs that contribute to crime and are changeable, such as attitudes and social behaviors;
- Providing multi-modal services to address a variety of needs rather than having a singular focus;
- Targeting each individual's specific needs, rather than all needs;
- Providing services that primarily include positive reinforcements;
- Providing intensive services lasting a minimum of three to six months and occupying 40-70 percent of the participants time while they are in the program;
- Providing supervision strategies that include rehabilitation or treatment;

² This year, DPS&C introduced a new requirement for an Individual Education Plan (IEP). IEP is an alternative education plan for low-literacy participants who lack basic reading, writing, and math skills needed to be in GED preparation.

- Providing continuous services during the period of transition from incarceration to release; and
- Including careful program design, implementation and monitoring.³

The Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program, much like the Year 2 Program, includes many of the principles identified as keys to effective re-entry programs. While these are not the standards against which we evaluate the design of the Post-Release Skills Program, it is worthwhile to note that the overall approach of the Post-Release Skills Program is in agreement with the program design principles that are found effective elsewhere.

Selection of Service Providers and Start-Up of the Year 3 Program

Using a competitive selection process, DPS&C called for qualified organizations to provide effective and cost efficient services according to the Year 3 Program guidelines and requirements. Six contractors were consequently chosen to provide services in five major cities in Louisiana: Behavioral Interventions, Inc., (BI) in Lafayette and Shreveport; Church United for Community Development (CUCD) in Baton Rouge; Indigent Partial Hospitalization (IPH) in Monroe; Little Union Baptist Church (LUBC) in Shreveport; Project Return in New Orleans; and Volunteers of America (VOA) in New Orleans. Three of the six selected service providers –BI, VOA, and Project Return—were continuing from the Year 2 Program.

Initially, DPS&C was scheduled to award contracts during early September 2003. However, due to an unexpected delay in the awarding process, contracts with the selected service providers were not finalized until February 2004.⁴ The delay in contract award did not extend the program period. Instead, the contracts were modified to shorten the program period from the original 12 months to 8 months. The delay in contract award meant that no services could be provided under the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program for approximately four months between October 2003 and February 2004. This suspension of the Program presented challenges for both new and continuing providers. Providers noted that the contract uncertainty made it difficult to maintain services for existing programs or to plan and prepare for the new program year.

³ Lawrence, S., D.P. Mears, G. Dubin, and J. Travis, 2002. *The Practice and Promise of Prison Programming*, Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

⁴ The delay was due to a petition filed by one of the contractors, which led to a proposal point recount and reallocation of a portion of the contracts.

Despite the deferment of TANF Initiatives funding, several of the selected service providers did offer limited services during the contract suspension period using alternative funding and resources from their parent organization. For example, VOA had the support of its parent organization to fund a maximum of two staff members who facilitated referrals to other agencies for former and new program participants during the suspension period. LUBC and CUCD used funds from their respective parent organizations to provide informal referral and case management services. Several providers reported that the suspension of funds resulted in a loss of credibility with participants and local community partners while programs operated with limited budgets and staff in an effort to keep continuity of care for participants. As we will discuss later, however, this initial delay and funding gap period did not seem to have impaired providers' ability to start up quickly once contracts were awarded in February.

Project Return, one of the two Post-Release service providers in New Orleans, abruptly discontinued services on June 21, 2004. In addition to the New Orleans service site, Project Return was a partner of a joint contract with Indigent Partial Hospitalization (IPH) to provide services in Monroe. This joint contract has been revised to allow IPH to continue operating in Monroe without Project Return as a contract partner. We were unable to collect information necessary to assess Project Returns' implementation of the Post-Release Skills Program prior to their program closure. As a result, Project Return is not included in this evaluation report. Information on Project Return's past performance is available in BPA's previous TANF Initiatives Evaluation Reports.

Beyond Year 3

The TANF Initiatives funding for the Post-Release Skills Program is scheduled to cease at the end of this program year (FFY2004). There is currently no plan to continue support of the Post-Release Skills Program beyond this point. According to DPS&C, contractor funds allocated originally to be used during the suspension period have not been reallocated. A few contractors have made efforts to obtain those funds so that they can extend their service contracts past the current September 30, 2004 end date. Their requests are currently under the review by DPS&C. In addition, several current providers have initiated discussion with each other to approach the legislature jointly to request the distribution of the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program funding left over from the Year 2 Program, as well as the funds not utilized during the Year 3 suspension. However, DPS&C noted that there has been no change in the allocation as of the time of this report.

Provider Backgrounds and Their Programs

The service providers selected for the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program represent a range of organizational backgrounds and experiences. While DPS&C laid out the overall framework of the program including services to be provided, target population, and monitoring requirement, providers are given significant flexibility in determining the details of program design including curricula, service contents, and delivery methods. Consequently, each local program under the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program can be seen as distinctively designed, reflecting the organizational strengths and limitations of each provider.

Overall, BI and VOA, the two providers who held Post-Release Skills Program contracts in the previous year (FFY2003), demonstrated a stronger foundation of procedures, initial program implementation, and participant assessment practices, as expected due to their past year of experience. These providers provide nearly all services in house. BI and VOA also represent well-established direct service organizations with experience in providing a range of social services around the country. Their local programs under the Post-Release Skills Program are supported by their respective corporate headquarters with regard to program administration and staff training. We will focus on the programs by these two providers in our outcomes evaluation since they had been operating just long enough to observe program impacts after a year.

Unlike BI and VOA, CUCD, LUBC, and IPH are new to the Post-Release Skills Program this year. The two church-based providers—CUCD and LUBC—are independent faith-based community groups with strong grassroots networks. Compared to the more corporate providers, they tend to utilize more community partners and resources, rather than onsite resources, to facilitate services. Similarly to BI and VOA, IPH is a large established direct service organization, although their local program under the Post-Release Skills Program has a much smaller operation, in terms of the number of clients and services provided, compared to BI and VOA.

As illustrated in Exhibit 2, Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program contractors vary in the types of classes, services, hours of operation, program length, and enrollment length. All programs provide required service components, including employment services, parenting classes, substance abuse counseling, and GED preparation. Most programs also offer classes or services during the evenings and weekends or otherwise try to accommodate participants' schedule needs, such as jobs and parole meetings. Below, we summarize below programs in more detail by provider.

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Evaluation of DPS&C Post-Release Skills Program

Exhibit 2
Summary of Operations for Post-Release Skills Programs

Location	Behavioral Interventions, Inc.		Volunteers of America	IPH	Church United for Community Development	Little Union Baptist Church
	Lafayette	Shreveport	New Orleans	Monroe	Baton Rouge	Shreveport
Allocated budget for FY 2003	\$1,303,695		\$548,280.90	\$357,210.00	\$512,171.10	\$121,500.00
Expenditures to date (as of 7/31/04)	\$201,391	\$218,818	\$183,311.24	\$127,764	\$311,668.61	\$80,840
Participant per diem	\$37.00	\$37.00	\$25.07	\$42.00	\$30.11	\$20
Annual participant target	100	100	350	175	70	75
Participant target per day ^a	75	70	90	35	70	25
Case Management Data collection	Computerized system ^b (Accutrax)		Paper ^c	Paper ^c	Paper ^c	Paper ^c
Organizational Background	For-profit with correctional services background		Spiritual-based	For-profit with faith based partnership ^d	Faith-based	Faith-based
Operating hours						
Monday thru Friday	8 am - 8 pm		9 am- 5 pm ^e	8 am-4:30 pm ^f	flexible hours, call to arrange ^f	9 am-2 pm ^f
Saturday and Sunday	12 pm – 5 pm		closed	8 am-4:30 pm	flexible hours, call to arrange	closed

^a Since programs vary in length, each site has an identified a "participant target per day" in order to reach its "annual participant target" by the end of the contract.

^b BI, Inc. sites use their corporate Accutrax software to maintain all case management data electronically.

^c Although these programs do not have a systematic electronic method of tracking case management information, they may have participant background information in electronic form.

^d IPH is located in the Lifeline Prison Ministry facility and includes several Lifeline participants and staff.

^e VOA closes at 3 p.m. on Fridays.

^f Programs offer and enroll participants in classes after hours off site through local partner agencies.

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Location	BI		VOA	IPH	CUCD	LUBC
	Lafayette	Shreveport	New Orleans	Monroe	Baton Rouge	Shreveport
Initial Assessment	LSI-R	LSI-R	X	LSI-R	X	X
Substance Abuse Prevention Education	1 day a week (4 hr sessions)	2 days a week (1.5 & 4 hrs sessions)	3 days a week (1 hr sessions)	1 day a week (2 hr session)	1 day a week (2 hr session)	2 days a week (1 hr sessions)
Substance Abuse Drug Testing	on site daily ^a	on site daily ^a	according to need	according to need	according to need	
Adult Basic Education & GED test preparation	Schedule information not available	3-4 days a week (1.5 hr sessions)	5 days a week (3 open hrs day)	2 days a week (2 hr sessions)	1 day a week (2 hr session)	5 days a week (1 hr sessions)
Job Skills/Employment Readiness	3 days a week (3 hr sessions) ^b	2 days a week (1.5 hr sessions)	3 days a week (1 hr sessions) ^c	1 day a week (2 hr session)	1 day a week (2 hr session)	^d
Computer Skills	Open Lab	Open Lab	5 days a week (1.5 hr sessions) ^e			

^a Substance Abuse Drug testing is a part of Phase I of BI, Inc., program.
^b BI, Inc., has introduced Work Keys, a work skills assessment software program, into the Employment Readiness class.
^c VOA employment readiness class offers several job shadowing and internship opportunities.
^d LUBC employment readiness class includes several on the job training opportunities with local partners.
^e VOA computer skills classes offer extensive training of the Microsoft Office Suite and design programs.

Program by Behavioral Interventions, Inc. (BI)

Behavioral Interventions, Inc. (BI) runs two program sites in Lafayette and Shreveport. BI operated a site in Baton Rouge under the Year 2 Post-Release Skills Program. BI is a for-profit criminal justice and corrections company started in Colorado in 1978. The company has developed a number of criminal justice-related technologies such as an electronic monitoring system used for supervision of former offenders and an automated case management system that collects information and fees from clients by phone. Since 1996, BI has increased its development of community-based services, including: court-ordered compliance supervision, accountability technology, drug testing, case management and reporting, intensive supervision, and comprehensive treatment, as well as education and employment services.

BI's Post-Release Skills Program is structured around its substance abuse treatment services combined with three phases of supervision. Classes take place in a group setting and include

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Evaluation of DPS&C Post-Release Skills Program

Exhibit 2 (continued)						
Location	BI		VOA	IPH	CUCD	LUBC
	Lafayette	Shreveport	New Orleans	Monroe	Baton Rouge	Shreveport
Parenting Skills	3 days a week (1.5 hr sessions) ^f	4 days a week (1.5 hr sessions) ^f	2 days a week (1.5 hr sessions) ^f		1 day a week (2 hr session) ^f	2 days a week (1 hr sessions)
Life Skills Instruction	4 days a week (1.5 hr sessions)	4 days a week (1.5 hr sessions)	3 days a week (1 hr sessions)	2 days a week (2 hr sessions)	1 day a week (2 hr session)	2 days a week (2 hr sessions)
Conflict Resolution/ Anger Management	1 day a week (1.5 hr sessions)	1 day a week (1.5 hr sessions)				2 days a week (1 hr sessions)
Personal Finance Management				1 day a week (2 hr session)	1 day a week (2 hr session)	
Moral Recognition Therapy	3 days a week (1.5 hr sessions)	4 days a week (1.5 hr sessions)	TBA			
Spirituality Class			2 days a week (1 hr sessions)			
Aftercare	formal ^g	formal ^g	informal ^h	informal ^h	informal ⁱ	informal ⁱ

^f Programs include several events and ceremonies for family members to attend throughout the year.
^g Included in the BI, Inc., program model although not yet implemented during the writing of this report.
^h Periodic check ins and phone calls to the participant by the job developer, although not yet implemented at IPH during the writing of this report.
ⁱ Not clearly defined by programs

Family Connections, employment preparation, WorkKeys, anger management, GED test preparation, life skills, and Moral Recognition Therapy (MRT).^{5,6} As participants progress through the program, the intensity of supervision decreases while treatment services are

⁵ WorkKeys assessments measure participants' basic skills against those necessary for the occupations that they are pursuing, and identify additional training needs that participants may have. Nine WorkKeys assessments gauge discrete workplace skills: three core assessments in applied mathematics, locating information, and reading for information; and six additional assessments in applied technology, listening, observation, teamwork, business writing, and writing. Hundreds of profiled occupations list skill competencies that employees need to be successful in the profiled jobs. Completing WorkKeys assessments provides a student with a standardized credential that demonstrates to employers that he/she has relevant skills for the desired occupation.

⁶ Moral Recognition Therapy is a step-by-step cognitive restructuring program designed to use a group process and improve how individuals reason, and make judgment decisions.

maintained. In phase one, the client must check in daily, comply with random drug and alcohol testing, and abide by an 8 p.m. curfew. In phase two, participants report for five days each week and the curfew is 10 p.m. In phase three, participants report for three days per week and have a midnight curfew. Curfews are enforced by daily calls from the BI curfew monitor and are used as behavioral milestones in progressing through the stages of the Post-Release Skills Program. The strict program requirements are designed to award and support those who are committed to the Program.

Program by Volunteers of America

This is the second year that Volunteers of America (VOA) is operating the Post-Release Skills program at its New Orleans site. VOA is a national, nonprofit, faith-based organization providing local human service programs. VOA's involvement with corrections dates back to the early 1900s when the organization established the nation's first system of halfway houses for released prisoners.

VOA's program under the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program is similar to last year's program with a few additional classes and services. Similar to last year, VOA offers individual and group counseling as well as classes in computer use, spirituality, substance abuse, employability, image building, parenting, Life Skills, and GED preparation. This contract year, VOA has added a MRT class as well as a literacy class. The program operates five days a week from the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (3 p.m. on Fridays). Critical program staff, such as the program's Substance Abuse Counselor, are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In order to serve as many and wide population as possible, VOA has an open enrollment policy that takes in any eligible applicant without necessarily screening for their commitment to or aptitude for the program.

Program by Church United for Community Development (CUCD)

The Church United for Community Development (CUCD) began its Support Through Employment Program (STEP) under the Year 3 TANF Post-Release Skills contract. The STEP programs are operated at two locations in the Greater Baton Rouge area, one in East Baton Rouge Parish and another in Assension Parish. CUCD is part of a consortium of 12 churches that work together to provide social services. In previous years, the CUCD has operated a TANF Initiative Fatherhood program. The CUCD program works with volunteers from partner agencies, such as the Department of Education, VISTA, Southern University and Louisiana State University, to enroll participants in the core Post-Release Skills Program courses such as parenting, relationship counseling, life skills, substance abuse prevention, and

financial budgeting classes. The CUCD program has a heavy focus on assistance and referrals and family preservation. This Post-Release Skills Program stresses modeling healthy relationships by offering family and couple social events such as double date nights and family BBQs and emphasizes one-on-one casework to provide individualized attention.

Program by The Little Union Baptist Church (LUBC)

The Little Union Baptist Church (LUBC) operates the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program as a division of the LUBC's One Church One Offender Program in Shreveport. The One Church One Offender Program was originally funded years ago by the church to operate as an alternative to incarceration, modeling after another church-based re-entry program in Kentucky. The One Church One Offender Program is currently housed at the church site and shares Sunday school classroom facilities. Program services include substance abuse prevention, a self-developed life skills curriculum (comprised of anger management, self-esteem, food, budgeting, addiction, job readiness, job search skills, parenting, etc.), GED and language classes offered by a local community partner, and on the job training organized in conjunction with local churches. The program works in conjunction with a ministerial advisory program that provides work sites for the participants who are receiving on the job training services.

Program by Indigent Partial Hospitalization (IPH)

Indigent Partial Hospitalization (IPH) is a for-profit human resources company established in 1998 and offers comprehensive soft and technical skills training services to a number of state agencies and companies. IPH's soft skills services include conflict resolution, leadership, executive management training, life skills, customer service, and diversity training. IPH's technical skills services include substance abuse education, job employment/readiness preparation, job placement, life skills and parenting training. IPH has experience with pre- and post-release skills training to corrections facilities throughout Louisiana. The IPH Post-Release Skills Program is located in Monroe and operated in close partnership with Lifeline Ministries. The program offers services such as job readiness, life skills, job placement, substance abuse prevention group counseling, and off-site GED preparation classes.

Implementation of the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program

Program Enrollment Status and Factors Affecting Enrollment

The Number of Participants

Despite the delayed start, the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program is making steady progress toward participation targets in terms of the number of individuals served. Exhibit 3 summarizes the number of participants in the first four months of the Year 3 Program. As noted earlier, the contracts did not become effective until February 2004 and providers started submitting monthly reports in March.

As shown in Exhibit 3, the number of monthly participants in the Post-Release Skills Program increased from 161 in March to 777 in July. The total unduplicated number of individuals served reached 777 in the first six months, quickly approaching the contract year target of 900.

Post-Release Skills Program providers have developed their own program calendar. Some programs serve several cycles of participant cohorts throughout the contract year while other programs provide services to participants for the full contract year. However, all Post-Release

Exhibit 3
Number of Participants in the Post-Release Skills Program Participants

	March	April	May	June	July	YTD Unduplicated Participation	Yearend Participation Target
BI: Lafayette	4	23	41	76	81	120	100
BI: Shreveport	18	41	49	75	84	129	100
CUCD	70	100	75	90	100	116	100
IPH	11	30	21	40	43	66	175
LUBC	22	32	43	48	42	141	75
VOA	36	88	93	95	107	205	350
Program Total	161	314	322	424	457	777	900

Source: Monthly Reporting Forms.

Skills Program providers have an open enrollment policy, allowing any eligible individual to start participating at any time, even midstream of the curriculum. This partly explains how programs are able to increase the number of participants steadily over the first few months of the contract year.

In addition to the number of participants, another key measure to assess progress in program implementation is the number of those participants who successfully complete the Post-Release Skills Program. However, no universal graduation benchmarks across program sites were found because providers define program graduation requirements differently. For example, finishing required curricula constitutes graduation for BI and IPH programs.⁷ On the other hand, VOA regards obtaining employment or completing their curricula as graduation. Both LUBC and the CUCD programs offer participants services up to the full contract year without clearly defined requirements that mark program completion. Because of inconsistent definitions of graduation and program completion across sites, it is not advisable to use these indicators to assess participants' progress in the program. A more relevant measurement to gauge the implementation progress at this early stage of the program may be the rate of participation for each individual program component, which we will present later in this section.

The Profiles of Participants

Service providers reported that participant profiles and characteristics vary across sites in terms of age range, ethnicity, gender, background, education level, and the types of crimes committed.⁸ Generally, the participants' profiles are consistent with those of adults incarcerated in the State's correctional facilities.⁹

Post-Release Skills Program providers across all sites reported that participants' ages range from 18 years to 55 years, with the majority of the participants being in their 20s and 30s. All sites reported that their participants are predominately African American and male. Staff also estimated that the majority of participants who do not have a high school diploma or the

⁷ IPH graduation is defined by completing the GED, goals, life skills, job readiness and ready for job placement. BI regard participants as graduated when they complete the three program phases.

⁸ Our discussion of participant profiles are based on interviews during BPA's site visits to the five Post-Release Skills Programs. Providers, except one, were not able to provide detailed individual-level participant demographic data in order to calculate exact numbers and ratios for participant characteristics.

⁹ According to DPS&C's March 31, 2004 Fact Sheet, of 36,524 adults incarcerated in correctional facilities (state prisons and local jails), 73.4 percent were African American, 93.2 percent were male, 31.6 percent committed drug crimes as their most serious charge, and the average age was 33 years old.

equivalent dropped out of school during the eighth or ninth grade. All providers except IPH reported that the majority of their participants were convicted of a drug related felony such as drug possession, drug selling, or drug abuse. IPH reported that convictions among participants were more evenly distributed among sex offenses, substance abuse, and theft.¹⁰

An overwhelming number of respondents across program sites described their participants' living situation as an "unsafe environment" because after being released from prison, the majority of the Post-Release Skills Program participants have limited access to resources and support structures. They observed that many former offenders do not have permanent homes, consistent source of meals, access to government services such as food stamps or public housing, or a promising source of income. Those participants often have no other options but to return to an unstable family environment and to a drug dealing neighborhood from which they originally came. According to staff, in several cases participants were aware of their high risk environment and expressed their concern for the cyclical criminal behavior that such an environment would likely to lead to.

Recruitment

DPS&C and Post-Release Skills Program providers agree that recruitment and retention of released former offenders are challenging because they are part of a highly transient population. Since it is difficult to locate former offenders once they are released, a great deal of recruitment efforts is concentrated to target those who are transitioning out of correctional facilities and on parole. Consequently, providers report that the majority of participants have been released from a prison facility within two months of joining the program and a few have been in the community for an extended period of time.

Recruiting efforts include partnering with parole officers, presentations in jails and at court hearings, as well as word of mouth. In some cases, programs work closely with the Probation and Parole office as well as with judges to create a mandatory attendance requirement for program participants. It seems that the Probation and Parole officers are a particularly reliable referral source for securing a constant inflow of participants. However, not every provider is currently working closely with Probation and Parole.

The majority of both BI and CUCD program participants come from referrals by Probation and Parole district offices. These two programs receive faxes from the Probation and Parole

¹⁰ Contractors are technically barred from serving former sex offenders to the extent that they offer family-oriented events and services at their sites. At the time of our interview, IPH was not offering services involving families.

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office with names and phone numbers of released offenders who have been mandated by their probation or parole officers to report to the Post-Release Skills Program. BI reports back to the Probation and Parole Office on non-reporting participants, and CUCD calls referred individuals within three days of receiving the fax. One staff member noted that individuals referred from the Probation and Parole office often had little to no information about the Post-Release Skills Program prior to being contacted by the program staff.

VOA received a significant number of participants through the local New Orleans Drug Court system to provide assistance to Drug Court clients with prior history of incarceration under a conditional program participation contract. LUBC has recruited participants through a number of its community resources including a network of local churches and media coverage (TV and newspaper outreach). According to program staff respondents, the majority of the participants learn about the program through word of mouth. The IPH program is co-located with the administrative office of Lifeline Prison Ministries, a local halfway house for former offenders. IPH has recruited approximately one third of its program participants from Lifeline. Other recruitment efforts are managed by the outreach coordinator who recruits from the local Probation and Parole Office as well as through word of mouth in the Monroe community.

Recommendation #1:

Given successful collaboration by some providers with the Probation and Parole Office and correctional facilities in referrals, we recommend that the Post-Release Skills Program explore opportunities to enhance its coordination and partnership with them further to strengthen case management. For example, at the local level, providers may consider if it is beneficial to hold regular meetings and correspondence with parole officers and prison/jail staff to provide them with program information and exchange notes on potential and enrolled clients. At the State and district levels, such coordination should be encouraged and, if appropriate, formalized in order to provide necessary support.

Strategies for Increasing Attendance and Program Completion

Providers have made efforts to encourage attendance and program completion through a variety of incentives such as transportation stipends, event nights, and negotiating conditional agreements with a local court and the Probation and Parole office. All five programs emphasized that their ability to serve as a third party to intervene with judges and Probation and Parole boards on behalf of program participants, to either wave or postpone court and parole fees, strengthened participation trust and confidence that the program could assist them in successful reentry into society.

Several VOA, BI, and CUCD staff respondents noted that family events served to increase the family support received by participants in the program and thus increased consistent program attendance. Programs offered events such as “play days” and BBQs for participants and their family members to attend. For example, CUCD staff reported that “Date Night,” a social event in which a case manager and his/her significant other goes on a double date with the participant and his/her significant other, and Sunday BBQs have been successful in providing an opportunity for program participants to experience and model positive family and couple interactions.

The lack of transportation is also often identified as a factor limiting participant's ability to attend the program as well as to work or do job searching. To alleviate transportation barriers, the BI Lafayette site provides van transportation to participants. Likewise, VOA distributes monthly bus passes to participants who have accumulated less than three absences in a month. IPH offers a \$5 per day gas stipend for transportation and LUBC offers free bus passes. At the CUCD site in East Baton Rouge where public transportation is limited, program staff drove participants to and from work until they could arrange other means of transportation.

Other incentives provided by programs include LUBC's free daily lunch, a monthly \$100 drawing, and a \$50 a month stipend for participants who are receiving on the job training. IPH has negotiating a probation fee waver for all of their participants to alleviate some of the financial burdens their participants face.

Provision and Utilization of Program Services and Classes

As we discussed earlier, while DPS&C specifies the general type of training classes and services to be provided under the Post-Release Skills Program, service contractors are given great flexibility in determining the curricula, contents, and delivery methods used for providing those classes and services. Consequently, program experiences by participants

could differ significantly from one site to another. In this section, we discuss how providers have implemented the Post-Release Skills Program at each site regarding key aspects and review the extent to which these classes and services were actually utilized by participants.

Overall Approaches to Service Delivery

While the contents of services and classes are all important, we observed that the experiences of participants are critically influenced by implicit and explicit messages conveyed about providers' guiding principles for their program approach. These messages are not only manifested in what and how services are delivered but also are communicated to participants through the atmosphere of classrooms and interactions with staff and peers.

For instance, BI's message about their approach may be described as that of fostering accountability and professionalism. A business-like atmosphere with a clearly documented and regimented three phase schedule speaks to the program's strengths and priorities. The BI program participants we interviewed also echoed that the expectation for accountability is a hallmark of their experience of the program. They noted that the BI's structured environment helped them gain discipline, while eliminating those participants who were not ready to take responsibility for a positive change in their life.

Although similar to BI in organization, VOA's approach is very different. Their implicit message may be described as that of motivating change through community building. This is seen in their extensive daytime classroom approach that brings people physically together in one place. The classroom approach lends to a strong sense of community and respect among participants and staff in a family-like atmosphere. Participants described their key experience at VOA in terms of its supportive environment.

The two contractors for the Year 3 Program—CUCD and LUBC—are faith-based organizations. As such their approaches may be characterized as fostering change in acceptance and commitment to individuals and families in their care. An emphasis on one-on-one casework at CUCD is an example of their focus on individual participants.

Service Contact Hours by Class

To gain a better understanding of participant attendance and the actual amount of services rendered by each provider, BPA collected daily contact hour data on the number of students attending each program service and class throughout the month of May. Exhibit 4 summarizes

Berkeley Policy Associates
Evaluation of DPS&C Post-Release Skills Program

Exhibit 4
Number of Participants and Contact Hours for Structured Classes in May 2004

	Average Num. of participants per session	Total number of contact hours in May
VOA (Total number of participants in May = 93)		
Personal responsibilities/Interpersonal Skills/Critical Thinking	9.0	108
Job Readiness	3.8	45
Purpose of Living	9.6	77
Substance Abuse Prevention	6.6	73
Family Reconciliation	7.6	61
Computer Literacy	12.2	366
GED	10.2	108
BI-Lafayette (Total number of participants in May = 41)		
Life Skills	5.8	131
MRT	5.4	89
Parenting Skills	9.1	245
Sub Abuse Ed	2.3	28
Employment Readiness	2.0	36
Anger Management	1.3	6
BI Shreveport (Total number of participants in May= 49)		
Life Skills	6.0	126
MRT	7.0	137
Parenting Skills	7.2	226
Sub Abuse Ed	5.1	15
Employment Readiness	6.2	56
GED Prep		
Anger Management	5.5	17
IPH (Total number of participants in May = 21)		
Life Skills Class	15.0	304
Substance Abuse Class	6.0	24
GED Class	4.0	46
Job Readiness / Job Placement	9.0	36
Financial and Budgeting Class	8.0	16
LUBC (Total number of participants in May = 43)		
Parenting	18.0	359
Budgeting	18.0	359
Conflict Resolution	18.0	359
Life Skills Class	18.0	359
Substance Abuse Class	18.0	359
GED Prep Class	18.0	359

Source: May contact hours provided by service contractors. CUCD did not provide information.
Numbers in the table are based on contractors' self reported counts of daily attendance for each class.

the average number of participants per session and total contact hours in May for structured classes offered at each program site or partner site. These measures complement the average number of participants per month reported in Exhibit 2, which was an indicator for the overall progress of the implementation.

The average numbers of participants who attended a class in any given day are significantly below the respective program's monthly attendance count. Most structured classes offered had an average attendance of less than 10 people. This is expected for several reasons. Some participants are not required to attend a particular class if their need is already met or irrelevant to the class. Some classes, such as substance abuse counseling and therapeutic sessions, limit the class size to ensure quality group interaction. Most importantly, many participants are unable to and not expected to attend all sessions because of job and other obligations that conflict with class schedules.

Providers note that a challenge faced by Post-Release Skills Program is balancing within each participants' schedule, the need for obtaining and working at a job with the need to expose them adequately to key curricular concepts in the program. Each provider has attempted to accommodate participant's work schedules by offering flexible or extended hours for their services and classes. Even so, it is expected that some employed participants will not be able to attend each session.

Contact hours, which are a sum of daily class and service hours multiplied by the number of attendants in each session, can be regarded as one measure for the amount of services utilized by participants. According to this measure, VOA has provided the most services, in terms of structured sessions, in computer literacy training, followed by GED preparation and personal skills (akin to life skills classes). On the other hand, BI's services are concentrated in parenting, life skills and MR classes. Similar to BI, IPH delivered the most services in life skills training. The participation in structured classes by each provider is discussed further below.

VOA classes are offered on a frequent basis during regular daytime office hours throughout the week. Most VOA classes are tracked into four levels: "freshmen" classes, which must be completed before taking "sophomore" classes, etc. The Computer Skills Class, with an average of over 12 participants 5 days a week, is one of VOA's popular classes. The GED class, which is offered several hours a day, 5 days a week, also has an average of over 10 participants each session. The VOA Purposes of Living Class, which was sited as a favorite by several VOA focus group respondents, also has an average attendance of 10 participants.

Since the BI program has an emphasis on finding employment, BI offers classes spread throughout the day and in the evenings to accommodate participants' work schedules. Classes are typically offered 3-4 days a week. The Parenting Skills Class at both program sites has the highest average number of attendance, followed by the Life Skills Class at the Lafayette site and MRT at the Shreveport site.

IPH offers the majority of its classes in the late afternoon and early evening to accommodate daytime work schedules of the program participants. IPH offers Life Skills, its most extensively utilized class, twice a week, where 15 participants on average attended. A smaller number attended the job readiness (9) and financial and budgeting (8) classes, and even a smaller number of participants (6) attended the substance abuse group therapy class. However, the small class size of substance abuse counseling was viewed as ideal by its instructor for the nature of the class.

The LUBC program structure offers participants multiple classes, including Life Skills, Substance Abuse Prevention, GED test preparation, Parenting, Budgeting, and Conflict Resolution, within a 2 hour window on a daily basis. LUBC reported that about 18 attended each day. Although BPA was not able to obtain contact hour data from CUCD, they shared with us a lesson they learned early on in their program. Initially they required participants to attend classes five days a week in the evening, but they found that daily evening classes placed strains on the participants' family relationships. This realization led to reducing the number of classes that participants were required to attend in order to increase the amount of time they spent with their families in the evenings.

Employment Assistance Strategies

Although each program's approach is different, all providers emphasized that their most important and immediate goal was, above all things, to place participants in gainful employment. Their common emphasis on employment is put into practice differently in each program. For example, LUBC, used its partnership with local church networks and placed several participants in church-related jobs. VOA motivated participants to find jobs by treating employment as an achievement worthy of recognition equal to program graduation. BI made sure that applicants understood and accepted the expectation for employment and strictly monitored their progress along their curriculum.

Providers are also well aware of challenges the participants face in landing a job because of their criminal backgrounds. Several providers mentioned the importance of sending only well-prepared participants, who could be expected to perform successfully, to a job interview,

so that the success of one candidate might encourage the recruitment of other candidates from the Post-Release Skills Program. Service providers also emphasized the need for participants to be forthcoming and honest about their former offender status and included coaching on how to address their background with a potential employer as part of job readiness classes.

Providers reported that they were utilizing resources available at local organizations, including local One-Stops (workforce development centers), to assist their participants in their job search and job skills development. For instance, VOA has a partnership with Goodwill Industries, and is sometimes able to send participants there to intern or shadow someone who has a job in a career that might interest the participant. Additionally, VOA uses contacts at the local workforce center and community college to learn about on the job training opportunities and possible openings in vocational classes.

CUCD has a close contact at the local One-Stop Center in Baton Rouge and receives up-to-date information on job openings for participants. CUCD also incorporates a WIA tool during intake to assess a participant's vocational and educational standing. A staff member at CUCD also conducts job recruitment by meeting with employers who are seeking to hire and pay a livable wage. The staff noted that although Baton Rouge offered well-paying employment opportunities for those interested in working at oil refineries, the insufficient public transportation system posed a barrier to those participants who are without own transportation.

The IPH employment specialist is also well networked with employers in the Monroe area and has been able to create on-the-job training opportunities for the participants. The employment specialist is able to receive feedback from the employers and use the information to help the participants further. LUBC has also used its network of churches to create a number of on the job training opportunities, such as providing cleaning services at local churches.

Implementation of Parenthood Services and Child Support Obligations

Parenthood training is another key component of the Post-Release Skills Program. Three of the five providers currently use a curriculum called *Quenching the Father's Thirst* as part of their parenting skills class component. The curriculum is divided into 13 lessons, which include assignments for students to apply the lesson in real life situations. Topics discussed include: child's needs, manhood, stress, family history, women, partnerships, and breakthrough fathering skills. When asked, most program staff respondents said they were able to easily adapt the lessons for their female participants.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier in the report, several providers offer family events and activities (e.g., BBQ lunches), which grant the participants' families an opportunity to visit the program and participate in games and activities together. The providers offering such events report that these activities are some of the program's strongest efforts to bring the participant closer to their family, and specifically to their children.

As part of the parenthood focus, the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program required the service providers to assist participants to comply with their child support obligations. The intention of this requirement is to foster participants' ties to their families as well as to coach them to be more accountable for their financial responsibilities. The implementation of child support obligation assistance was mixed. While one provider monitors whether participants have child support obligations and whether they are paid, no providers seem to have a strategy for assisting parents to comply with child support obligations. Providers do not have any group or one-on-one orientation or counseling about child support obligations, nor is there any systematic effort to ensure the family is adequately assisted in case child support cannot be paid.

A few sites noted that in some cases the program staff worked with the judge to postpone child support payments because the participant was unable to afford the deduction from his wages. The case was made that postponing payments would discourage the participant from seeking out illegal forms of income, such as drug dealing. Although these few instances of temporarily waiving child support obligations may have been well justified, it was not clear whether the programs were providing additional guidance and counseling for these participants on safeguarding the well-being of a child who is in need for parental support and setting realistic goals and making plans to resume payments in the future.

Recommendation #2: *We recommend that DPS&C provide additional guidelines and technical assistance to providers on monitoring and facilitating participants' compliance with child support obligations. DPS&C should ensure that assistance for participants and their families regarding child support is provided consistently across all sites.*

Monitoring Progress and Improvements Among Participants

All Post-Release Skills Program providers assign every participant to a case manager who is supposed to meet formally with the participant on a weekly basis and informally as often as a daily basis. The case management assignment is expected to play a central role in monitoring and motivating participants' progress. All five providers indicated that case managers were meeting with their assigned participants regularly as planned.

Both BI and VOA have adopted a system for quantifying and evaluating participant progress. BI uses the Accutrax software to track client progress along phases toward program benchmarks. VOA uses a point system, in which participants are awarded points based on attendance, performance, and participation in class. Sufficient accumulation of points enables a participant to pass from one level to the next. This point system also gives the participants short-term goals to aim towards.

The three new contractors do not have clearly defined benchmarks to assess participant's progress. At LUBC, progress is determined on a case-by-case basis under each participant's individual plan. In addition to using case notes, instructors at CUCD and IPH use curricula based quizzes and exercises. The results of the quizzes and exercises are used to make a subjective judgment on participants' progress on a case-by-case basis, rather than being used to evaluate progress on a universal program-wide scale.

As noted earlier, providers also often lacked clear definitions for the completion of the program as a whole or of components of the program. The lack of clear and consistent standards for what constitute completion pose challenges in terms of both monitoring progress and motivating participants toward observable milestones.

Recommendation #3: *We recommend that DPS&C require all providers to develop a comprehensive strategy for tracking and evaluating individual progress toward monitorable goals. Such a strategy should include clearly defined requirements for completing key program components and for program graduation. Providers should also develop a tool to gauge individual progress against the program-wide standard as well as against participants' own goals.*

Post Program Services for Graduates

According to DPS&C, graduates from the Post-Release Skills Program should be provided with post-program services (sometimes called "after care" services). These additional services for program graduates are to be provided as part of the administrative budget with no per diem reimbursement. At the time of writing this report, most providers did not have graduates to provide post-program services to. Nevertheless, VOA, BI, and IPH have a set of follow up policies for graduates in place. Under VOA and IPH's plans, employment specialists conduct either at home or employer phone calls every couple of months after graduation. BI has an after care component built into the final phase of their three phase program, although staff at the new Shreveport site did not seem well informed of the post-program policy of BI. Two of the new providers, LUBC and CUCD, have not developed any plan for post-program care, mainly because they provide yearlong programs.

Referrals to Community Resources

Released former offenders often have employment, social, medical, and physical survival needs that cannot be met within the scope of the Post-Release Skills Program. In addition to the core classes and services designed, all providers noted that referrals were made frequently for a range of additional supportive services including: legal assistance, childcare, counseling, clothing and housing. Exhibit 5 below provides an example of referrals made in the month of May for BI and LCBU.¹¹

Former offenders are often at a great disadvantage in their ability to meet day-to-day necessities as well as in their deep-seated needs for rehabilitation upon release from a facility. The program staff pointed out that these former offenders were often ineligible for government assistance because of their recent offender status or incarceration history, and had little knowledge about where else they could get help. Because of their urgent needs and their limited ability to find resources on their own, providers view their role in facilitating access to additional services as critical. For instance, VOA and CUCD staff in our interviews stressed the importance of teaching a client to seek out resources in their local communities. VOA worked with its community partners such as Goodwill to help participants with clothing and employment, in addition to utilizing its parent organization's resources for additional services such as legal assistance and housing. At CUCD, program staff often seek out resources to meet specific needs of participants and make sure that, once the resource is identified, the participants should be able to access it on their own in the future.

¹¹ BPA requested all providers to track referrals made during the month of May 2004, and BI and LCBU provided the requested information.

Exhibit 5
Number of Referrals Made Per Month
 Examples from May 2004, for BI and LUBC Programs

	BI, Inc. Lafayette	BI, Inc. Shreveport	Little Union Baptist Church
Number of participants in May	41	49	43
Type of Referrals			
Attorney			60
Childcare	12	10	
Clothing		2	
Counseling	17	14	
Employment	9	52	30
Food Stamps		16	
Housing	2	10	15
SA Outpatient	16		
School			22

Source: May contact hours provided by service contractors. CUCD did not provide information. Numbers in the table are based on contractors' self reported counts of daily attendance for each class.

DPS&C's Role

In its third year of administering the TANF-funded Post-Release Skills Program, DPS&C role is primarily to monitor the programs and offer support to providers when they are unable to meet the performance indicators.

DPS&C regularly reviews the progress of implementation based on mandatory monthly reports submitted by providers. In these monthly reports, providers are required to indicate the number and percentage of eligible participants engaged in each of the following services:

- Achieving goals established by their Individual Educational Plan (IEP)
- Job training and placement assistance activities
- Substance abuse treatment services
- GED or other basic education program training

- Financial and/or budget management skills training
- Child Support Counseling
- Making contact with children
- Relationship, responsible parenting, and family counseling services

We found that providers are not always filling the required monthly reporting forms consistently or correctly. While the form and instructions have been revised since the Year 2 Program, there appears to be some misunderstanding of what exact information has to be reported.

In addition to reviewing monthly reports, DPS&C staff conducts monitoring visits in person. To date, DPS&C staff have conducted at least one site visit to all program sites. A second round of site visits to each program site is scheduled for August of 2004. DPS&C has had various Probation and Parole staff conduct site visits to the Post-Release Skills program in their local area.

DPS&C regards site visits as a key for monitoring, supervising, and supporting providers because many of the challenges that arise in providing such services cannot be universally captured on the monthly reporting forms. For example, a recent monitoring visit by DPS&C staff to one provider that was lagging in performance indicators provided an opportunity not only to check on progress but also to discuss the issues with the provider in person and provide needed assistance.

Participants' Perspective

In order to understand the program implementation and its impacts from the perspectives of participants, we conducted participant focus groups at three program sites: BI (Shreveport), VOA, and LUBC. The focus group respondents were recruited among those who attended the program on the day of the visit. Information gathered from focus groups does not represent experiences of all program participants and should not be generalized. Instead, the information is gathered primarily to give an illustration of and enhance our understanding of the issues faced by the Program and participants.

Focus group respondents' opinions on the Post-Release Skills Program were overwhelmingly positive at all sites. Respondents viewed the Program as providing comprehensive support and extended understanding for their needs. They valued both the tangible assistance and training they received with getting a job and learning skills as well as intangible benefits of

receiving encouragement and emotional support from staff and peers. Their deep appreciation for the Program also underscored the lack of other support systems in their life.

While respondents regarded its holistic approach with a variety of services available to them as the strength of the Post-Release Skills Program, they also mentioned program elements that they particularly appreciated. These included a computer skills course which they viewed as leading to a good paying job, flexible hours that allowed them to attend around their work schedule, and faith-based affirmation of self worth that built confidence and self-respect. Several respondents also mentioned that although the importance of some training requirements such as writing good resumes, practicing interviews, and parenting classes were not immediately obvious to them, but that they came to value them after participating in these classes and recognizing their needs in these areas. Such responses indicate that requiring the participation in all elements of the Program as a package, rather than offering them as piecemeal services, may be an effective way to support participants with their complex needs.

Impact of the Post-Release Skills Program

Employment Outcomes

One of the main goals of the Post-Release Skills Program is to assist former offenders to successfully reintegrate into society both socially and economically. Employment among participants is a key indicator for assessing whether the Post-Release Skills Program is meeting this goal. To the extent that the Program improves participants' ability to obtain and retain a job through program services and training, it enhances the participants' prospect for self-sufficiency as well as their capacity to support their families, and it helps reduce the chance of relapsing into criminal behavior. In this section, we present our findings on the employment outcomes of Post-Release Skills Program participants in terms of change in the rate of employment, retention, and the level of earnings.

We conducted our analysis of employment outcomes using participation data for those enrolled between October 2002 and December 2003 under last year's program and Louisiana Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records through the fourth quarter 2003. Our sample consists of participants from programs operated by two contractors—BI and VOA—which provided services during the last program year (FFY2003).¹² There are a total of 720 participants on the records provided by the programs.

¹² BI participants included in our outcome analyses are from BI's Baton Rouge site, which was discontinued at the end of the Year 2 Program.

As discussed earlier, the Post-Release Skills Program starts providing employment services to participants several weeks after they enroll in the program. In Year 2 and Year 3 both BI and VOA's programs have encouraged participants to be employed throughout their program participation, rather than aiming to place them at the completion. Therefore, in order to measure program effects of these types of ongoing services, we have tracked participant employment from program entry. Outcomes will be measured as the changes in employment-related indicators over the course of program participation—i.e., any changes between entry and exit dates. We will also examine post-program employment to assess whether participants are able to sustain or improve their employment rates and wages after leaving the program.

Employment Rates and Earnings Before and After Program Participation

Overall, employment indicators among participants improved during the course of their program enrollment, which averaged 92 days during the FFY2003 program year. Exhibit 6 summarizes the employment rates and earnings at participant entry and exit. For this analysis, participant exit could mean either program completion or withdrawal. As shown, the employment rate among participants during entry quarter was 31 percent and increased to 38 percent in the exit quarter. The quarterly earnings among those employed also rose from \$1,773 in the entry quarter to \$2,148 in the exit quarter.

Exhibit 6		
Employment among Program Participants in Entry and Exit Quarters		
Year 2 Participants from VOA and BI Programs		
	Percent Employed (%)	Average Quarterly Earnings among the Employed (\$)
Quarter of Entry to the Program	30.8	1,773
Quarter of Exit from the Program	37.5	2,148

Number of Observations: 715
 Note: Individuals are counted as employed if their total quarterly earnings are \$100 or higher. The sample is limited to those for whom both entry and exit quarters are observed.
 Source: Year 2 program participant records obtained from BI and VOA and Louisiana Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance wage records through the fourth quarter 2003.

Exhibit 7		
Employment among Program Participants, By Completion Status		
Year 2 Participants from VOA and BI Programs		
	Percent Employed (%)	Average Quarterly Earnings among the Employed (\$)
Those Completed or Graduated		
Quarter of Entry to the Program	36.2	1,978
Quarter of Exit from the Program	46.6	2,797
Those Who Did Not Complete		
Quarter of Entry to the Program	28.3	1,657
Quarter of Exit from the Program	33.4	1,743

Number of Observations: 221 (completers) and 494 (non-completers)
 Note: Individuals are counted as employed if their total quarterly earnings are \$100 or higher.
 The sample is limited to those for whom both entry and exit quarters are observed.
 Source: Year 2 program participant records obtained from BI and VOA and Louisiana Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance wage records through the fourth quarter 2003.

The improvement in employment indicators over the course of program participation is also affected by whether participants complete the program and how long they participate. Those who are able to complete the program did better than those who did not complete it. As shown in Exhibit 7, the employment rate among those who completed the program increased by over 10 percentage points from 36 to 47 percent between their program entry and exit quarters, whereas it increased by only 5 percentage points for those who dropped out of the program. Similarly, while the average quarterly earnings of those employed increased by \$819 for program completers, it improved by less than \$100 for those who did not complete the program. On average, the program completers stayed in the program for 181 days, while those who withdrew stayed in the program for only 53 days.

We also found that the longer participants remain in the program, the greater the improvements in employment indicators regardless of whether the person actually completes the program or not. As Exhibit 8 illustrates, the employment rate among those who stayed in the program for less than 30 days (who are largely dropouts) has increased less than 3 percentage points, while it increased over 10 percentage points among those who stayed 60 or more days. Although not shown, this pattern holds for both program completers and dropouts.

Exhibit 8
Employment Rate among Participants, By Length of Participation
 Year 2 Participants from VOA and BI Programs

Days Between Entry and Exit Dates	Percent Employed		
	29 days or less	30 to 59 days	60 days or more
Quarter of Entry to the Program	28.8	27.9	33.2
Quarter of Exit from the Program	31.3	32.4	43.6
Number of Observations	233	136	346

Note: Individuals are counted as employed if their total quarterly earnings are \$100 or higher. The sample is limited to those for whom both entry and exit quarters are observed.
 Source: Year 2 program participant records obtained from BI and VOA and Louisiana Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance wage records through the fourth quarter 2003.

That is, even among those who did not successfully complete the program, if they participated in the program for 60 or more days, their employment rate had increased by 10 percentage points by the time they left the program.

Type of Industry Before and After Program Participation

There is not a noticeable shift before and after program participation in the type of industry in which program participants had employment. Exhibit 9 presents the industry distribution in the quarter of entry and the quarter of exit. In both quarters, participants, if employed, were concentrated in trade and service industries, followed by construction. In the quarter of entry, 38 percent of the employed participants were in some type of services, 36 percent in wholesale or retail trade, and 9 percent in construction. In the quarter of exit, 43 percent of the employed participants were in services, 33 percent in trade, and 10 percent in construction. In particular, participants were concentrated in industries characterized by low-skill, low-wage jobs such as food services, temp agencies, and hotels. Considering that many of the Post-Release Skills Program participants lack a stable work history and have a criminal background, it is not surprising that the industries in which they work are the ones most likely to be offering jobs with lower entry thresholds.

Exhibit 9
Industry of Employment Before and After Program Participation
 Year 2 Participants from VOA and BI Programs

	Quarter of Entry <hr/> (%)	Quarter of Exit <hr/> (%)
Agriculture/Mining	0.9	1.1
Construction	9.6	9.3
Manufacturing	5.0	5.2
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	2.7	2.2
Wholesale Trade	5.0	2.6
Retail Trade: Eating & drinking places	19.1	22.8
Retail Trade: Others	9.1	10.8
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	0.9	2.2
Business services: Temp Agencies	18.6	13.1
Business services: Others	5.9	6.0
Services: Hotel/Lodging/Recreational	6.8	8.6
Services: Health	4.1	3.0
Services: Auto and Miscellaneous Repair	2.7	2.2
Services: Others	5.0	5.2
Public Administration	0.5	1.1
Not classifiable	<u>4.1</u>	<u>4.5</u>
Total	100.0	100.0
Number of observations	220	268

Note: The sample includes individuals with quarterly earnings of \$100 or higher. If individuals have two or more industries in the quarter, we included the industry for which reported earnings were the largest.
 Source: Year 2 program participant records obtained from BI and VOA.

Program Differences in Employment Outcomes

While employment indicators for participants improved between entry and exit for both BI and VOA programs, there are notable differences between the two. As discussed earlier, these programs contrast with each other regarding their enrollment policies, program approaches, and staff experience and backgrounds. In a very general way, BI may be described as a professional model with strict enrollment requirements to target and motivate participants, whereas VOA may be described as a peer-support model with more flexible participation requirements.

Exhibit 10
Length of Participation, By Program
 Year 2 Participants from VOA and BI Programs

	BI	VOA
Average Number of Days Enrolled	175.1	54.1
Percent of Participants Enrolled in		
29 days or less	10.2	42.6
30 to 59 days	8.9	23.5
60 to 89 days	12.8	15.0
90 days or more	68.1	18.9
Percent of Program completers	57.1	18.7
Number of observations	226	493

Note: The sample includes all individuals participated regardless of their program exit status. The sample includes those whose participation was cut short due to the closure of the program. Those with the status code indicating "completed", "graduated", or "successful (exit)" are counted as completers. For VOA, the number of days enrolled is calculated based on 489 observations for which both program entry and exit dates are reported.

Source: Year 2 program participant records obtained from BI and VOA.

There programmatic differences appear to be reflected in participants' exit patterns and employment outcomes. Overall, participants in the BI program averaged 175 days in the program while those in the VOA program averaged 54 days. The difference in the length of enrollment may be due to the differences in intake, approaches, and enrollment requirements between the two programs. BI's more selective screening process may ensure higher program completion rates among those accepted for enrollment. On the other hand, VOA accepts virtually all eligible applicants and thus their services are widely available. As a result, a higher ratio of BI participants completed their program (57 percent for BI vs. 19 percent for VOA), while VOA provided services to more individuals (226 total participants for BI vs. 493 total participants for VOA).

Employment indicators show an improvement between entry and exit for both BI and VOA participants. Among BI participants, the employment rate increased from 38 to 43 percent, while the employment rate among VOA participants increased from 27 to 35 percent. The corresponding quarterly earnings among the employed increased from \$2,134 to 2,752 for BI, and \$1,538 to 1,811 for VOA.

Exhibit 11
Employment among Program Participants, By Program
Year 2 Participants from VOA and BI Programs

	Percent Employed (%)	Average Quarterly Earnings among the Employed (\$)
BI Participants		
Quarter of Entry to the Program	38.5	2,134
Quarter of Exit from the Program	42.5	2,752
VOA Participants		
Quarter of Entry to the Program	27.2	1,538
Quarter of Exit from the Program	35.2	1,811

Number of Observations: 226 (BI) and 489 (VOA)

Note: Individuals are counted as employed if their total quarterly earnings are \$100 or higher.

The sample is limited to those for whom both entry and exit quarters are observed.

Source: Year 2 program participant records obtained from BI and VOA and Louisiana Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance wage records through the fourth quarter 2003.

These two programs cannot be directly compared because of important differences in program approaches as well as in local economic environments. Furthermore, the type of clients they serve may also differ. The initial employment rates and earnings are higher among BI participants than VOA participants, indicating that profiles of participants—particularly regarding their employability—may not be comparable.¹³ The results of employment indicator analysis between entry and exit dates also reflect the different strengths of each program. In terms of employment rate gains, BI increased by 4 percentage points, and VOA increased by 8 percentage points. On the other hand, increases in average earnings among the employed were \$614 (a 29 percent increase) for BI, and \$273 (a 10 percent increase) for VOA.

¹³ We also examined employment indicators in quarters prior to the entry dates. We found that the difference in employment indicators between the two programs existed prior to the participants' entry into the program.

Exhibit 12
Post-Program Employment Rate among Participants
 Year 2 Participants from VOA and BI Programs

	Percent Employed			Num. of Obs
	Quarter of Exit	1st Quarter After Exit	2nd Quarter After Exit	
All Participants	35.8	29.8	28.6	363
BI Participants	45.3	23.4	18.8	64
VOA Participants	33.8	31.1	30.8	299

Note: Individuals are counted as employed if their total quarterly earnings are \$100 or higher. The sample is limited to those for whom two quarters after exit are observed.
 Source: Year 2 program participant records obtained from BI and VOA and Louisiana Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance wage records through the fourth quarter 2003.

Employment Rates Following Exit from the Program

The ultimate success of the Post-Release Skills Programs is measured by whether they have a lasting positive impact on former inmates' lives. In order to gauge the effects of the program beyond the program participation period, we next look at the employment indicators after participants leave the program. Because of limitations in data availability, we are able to examine post-program employment only for the short term. Specifically, we limited our analysis sample to those for whom we can observe outcomes for at least two quarters after the quarter of exit. There were a total of 363 participants who left the programs (either dropped out or completed) and whom we could observe at least two quarters after exit.

As shown in Exhibit 12, while the Post-Release Skills Program appears to have improved employment indicators among participants during the course of their participation, these positive results do not seem to continue after exit from the program. Among those for whom we can observe outcomes for two quarters after exit, the employment rate reached a peak of 36 percent at exit, and then steadily decreased after to 29 percent by the second quarter after exit. Thus by the second quarter after exiting the program, employment rates are back down to the entry quarter level. This declining trend continued into the third quarter for those whom

we could observe three quarters after exit¹⁴. With regard to the differences between the two programs, the employment rate among former VOA participations remained relatively stable compared to that of former BI participants.

The weak employment outcomes after program exit and the differences between the two programs may reflect the availability, or lack thereof, of post-program services to participants. Last year we observed that the programs did not have clearly defined follow-up plans for either graduates or dropouts. As discussed earlier, post-program follow-ups and care during transition out of the program are limited again this year. In addition, the four-month discontinuity in contracts at the end of FFY2003 is likely to have led to interruptions in any outreach efforts to former participants. While post-program care alone will not guarantee improved employment outcomes among former participants, it is important for the programs to be able to anticipate and address, to the extent possible, participant needs after their exit from the program.

The difference in post-employment outcomes between BI and VOA may also be partly explained by the program's ability to track or to be available to former clients. BI closed its FFY2003 program location (Baton Rouge) and opened its FFY2004 programs at different locations (Lafayette and Shreveport). This meant that individuals who were enrolled in the FFY2003 program were not able to receive any follow-up contacts or services, since the program itself had closed. On the other hand, VOA continued to operate at the same location for two program years in row (FFY2003 and FFY2004). Even with initial interruptions to the FFY 2004 program, VOA still offered more continuity than BI and was better able to follow up with its former participants.

Recommendation #4: *We recommend that DPS&C ensure that all providers have plans for following up with graduates regularly for at least six months after their exit from the program. We also recommend that the programs provide exit preparation focusing on job retention as classes or as part of case management, and conduct a formal exit interview to ensure that participants know about post-program services and follow-up plans. We also recommend that the programs develop job retention and advancement services if appropriate.*

¹⁴ There are 197 observations for which we could observe three quarters after exit. For those individuals, the employment rate declined from 35.0 percent in the quarter of exit, to 28.9 in the first quarter after exit, 28.4 in the second quarter after exit, 26.9 in the third quarter after exit.

Re-Entry to State Correctional Facilities

In addition to employment indicators, the rate of recidivism is another measure for assessing how the Post-Release Skills Program is helping former offenders to reintegrate into society. To the extent that the program improves participants' ability to obtain and retain a job and equips them with the skills needed to navigate challenges they face in their daily lives, it can reduce the chance of relapsing into criminal behavior. In this section, we provide preliminary findings on recidivism statistics based on a sample of program participants.¹⁵

We conducted our analysis of recidivism using participation data for those enrolled between October 2002 and December 2003 in the VOA and BI programs and DPS&C's inmate information database, the Corrections and Justice Unified Network System (CAJUN). For our analysis, we define recidivism as incarceration in a state correctional facility that took place after entering the Post-Release Skills Program. Because CAJUN captures only the cases which come under DPS&C's jurisdiction, we are not able to assess the incidents of arrest, conviction, or detention in general. Furthermore, as discussed in the employment outcomes section, because many participants completed the program relatively recently, there are a limited number of former participants for whom we can observe outcomes for more than a year. Consequently, the results presented here should be considered preliminary.

Of 720 participants enrolled in the program between October 2002 and December 2003, 208 were identified as having been incarcerated in state correctional facilities prior to joining the Post-Release Skills Program. There are different reasons why some participants in the Post-Release Skills Program had not been found to have been incarcerated in state correctional facilities. Most likely they had been incarcerated in parish jails or placed on probation instead of in state prisons. In addition, data entry errors in program participant records or CAJUN (e.g., incorrect social security numbers) could have resulted in missing information. In the following, we focus our discussion on those participants who were incarcerated in state correctional facilities prior to entering the Post-Release Skills Program.

As of July 2004, of the 208 former state prison inmates that joined the Post-Release Skills Program, 48 (23 percent) have been re-incarcerated in state correctional facilities since the time of program entry. When we limit our sample to those who entered the program a year ago or earlier (i.e., those for whom we can observe at least one year after their entry to the

¹⁵ DPS&C has also estimated recidivism among the Post-Release Skills Program participants based on VOA program completers since 2002. Of the 150 program completers, DPS&C found 111 were in DPS&C custody before entering the program. After the program completion, 11 returned to DPS&C custody, including 6 who were previously not in DPS&C custody.

program), we found that 74 percent (111 of 151) were kept from being placed back in state correctional facilities for at least a year. In other words, 26 percent recidivated to state facilities within a year after entering the program.

We also examined the rate of re-admission since last release. In our sample, 70 participants were last released from state facilities in 2002 before joining the Post-Release Skills Program. Of those, 24 percent (17 of 70) had returned to state correctional facilities by July 2004. This number appears to compare favorably with other, non-participant, offenders released during the same period. DPS&C reports, as of June 2004, that 32 percent of all inmates released from state adult facilities during 2002 had returned by July 2004.¹⁶ Thus, Post-Release Skills Program participants who had been released in 2002 recidivated at a slower rate than other former offenders released from state facilities in the same year. As noted earlier, these findings are preliminary and limited in the scope, but they are suggestive of a positive program impact on the program participants.

Conclusion

The Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program is designed to provide a comprehensive set of services, including substance abuse counseling, family counseling, GED preparation and academic enhancement, conflict resolution and anger management training, communication and relationship skills training, parenting skills, assistance with child support obligations, job skills training, and job placement assistance. The five service contractors we studied for this report have been able to offer all of these required services; however, assistance with child support obligations was implemented inconsistently and often not thoroughly, and appears to have room for improvement. While the array of services characterizes the program's holistic approach to assisting released former offenders with reintegration into their families and communities, the highest priority of every provider seems to be successful employment of participants.

The service providers selected for the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program represent a range of organizational backgrounds and experience. Although DPS&C laid out the overall framework of the program, including services to be provided, target population, and monitoring requirements, providers were given significant flexibility in determining the details of program design, including curricula, service contents, and delivery methods. Consequently, each local program under the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program can be seen

¹⁶ DPS&C Monthly Statistical Performance Report: Briefing Book, an electronic version referenced on 9/14/04 at <http://www.corrections.state.la.us/Statistics/BB.htm>.

as distinctively designed and implemented. The local programs ranged from BI's highly structured and regimented program which emphasizes individual responsibility, to VOA's group-focused program with strong staff and peer support, to CUCD's faith-based program with its strong focus on family relationships. Participants voiced appreciation for all types of programs, citing their respective strengths.

Despite the delayed start due to contract award suspension, the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program is making steady progress toward participation targets in terms of the number of individuals served. The number of monthly participants in the Post-Release Skills Program increased from 161 in March to 424 in June. The total unduplicated number of individuals served reached 441 in the first four months, which was about half way to the contract year target of 900.

Many participants have been recruited through referrals from the Probation and Parole office. The Probation and Parole officers appears to be serving as a particularly reliable referral source for securing a constant inflow of participants since they are able to hold participants accountable to attend. However, the extent to which each local program coordinates with the Probation and Parole office varies, and not all of those who receive referrals from the Probation and Parole office collaborate beyond recruitment efforts. Hence there seems to be an opportunity for enhancing the partnership with the Probation and Parole Office (as well as with correctional facilities) not only for recruitment, but also to exchange information about potential and enrolled clients, and to receive input for effective strategies to assist them.

One weak area of implementation is in the assistance with compliance with child support obligations, which is a required component of the Year 3 Post-Release Skills Program. While one provider is monitoring whether participants have child support obligations and whether the obligations are being met, other providers did not have a clear strategy for assisting parents to comply with child support obligations. Although the intent of the mandated assistance with child support compliance is to foster participants' ties to their families and to coach them in becoming more accountable for their financial responsibilities, it is being treated more or less as an eligibility requirement to be checked off, rather than as an integral part of the parenthood services.

All providers have made concentrated efforts in encouraging and assisting participants to find employment, through training classes and job search and placement services. While we are unable to assess the impact of the program on employment for this year's participants because the data are not yet available, we found that, among the Year 2 program participants, the employment rate increased about 7 percentage points, from 30 to 37 percent, between entry

to and exit from the program. The gain in employment was even larger—over 10 percentage points—among those who participated in the program over the 60 calendar day period. The quarterly earnings among those employed also increased, from \$1,773 to \$2,148.

While the Post-Release Skills Program appears to have improved employment indicators among participants during the course of their participation, these positive results did not improve once they left the program. Among those for whom we can observe outcomes for two quarters after exit, the employment rate reached a peak of 36 percent at exit from the program, and then steadily decreased to 9 percent by the second quarter after exit. The weak employment outcomes after program exit suggest the importance of well-designed post-program services and follow-ups with those who graduate from the program.

Overall, the BPA evaluation team found that the Post-Release Skills Program has made a commendable start in implementing key components of the program in the first several months of the contract. The positive employment outcomes for Year 2 participants suggest that the program indeed improves participants' chances of finding a better job, despite the multiple barriers to employment that many of them face. In addition, the program has been successful in providing much-appreciated moral support for participants and families.