

Study shows meth program success

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Montana's methamphetamine treatment programs are a resounding success during their first three years of providing treatment services operation, according to a study conducted by University of Montana Professor Tim Conley. Of the nearly 300 offenders who completed the nine-month programs, none have been convicted of another drug-related offense, the newly released report found.

In addition, researchers found the rate at which offenders complete the treatment programs has increased significantly "despite substantially more from prison."

Since a report by Conley two years ago, the completion rate improved from 71 percent to 82 percent. The report attributed this change to an "increasing level of competence at providing treatment services to very challenging treatment population."

"It is likely that this trend will continue as adjustments and population management strategies adapt to changes in participant profile," the study concluded.

The two treatment centers opened during the first six months of 2007. Nexus, the 80-bed facility for males, is in Lewistown and Elkhorn, the 36-bed facility for women, is in Boulder. Each is operated by a nonprofit company under contract with the state. The stand-alone centers are thought to be the first developed in the country to address the meth problem. Offenders spend nine months in treatment followed by six months of aftercare in prerelease centers.

The study is the second one conducted to comply with a department requirement that the programs' performance and effectiveness be evaluated. The initial study was released in September 2008, but the programs had been operating only about 15 months by that time and the first offenders participating in the program were just completing the mandatory stay in prerelease centers.

"This second study is a more comprehensive measure of how well the treatment programs are functioning in keeping offenders from returning to destructive cycles of drug use and abuse," said Mike Ferriter, director for the Montana Department of Corrections. "We are very pleased with the results so far and believe they demonstrate that these programs are valuable additions to Montana's correctional system capable of doing what we told lawmakers and citizens they would do.

"This report demonstrates the strength and value of the partnership the department has forged with both the private, nonprofit corporations operating the programs and the university system," Ferriter said. "That partnership and the programs themselves are the products of hard work by corrections officials and a strong commitment by Gov. Brian Schweitzer to support pioneering correctional programs."

Although none of the 299 offenders completing the treatment programs have committed new drug crimes, three offenders returned to prison for violating conditions of their community placements. The report said that number was too small to determine what factors put them at risk to recidivate.

However, the study determined three factors that make an offender less likely than others to complete the meth treatment programs. Offenders who are younger, have fewer felonies or are mentally ill are higher risk to fail the programs, the authors said.

The report noted that the rate at which offenders complete both the nine-month treatment program and six months in a prerelease center is 82 percent.