

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report provides an assessment of three City-funded programs that seek to address the various challenges that confront individuals with a history of criminal offending and some combination of homelessness, chemical dependency, and mental illness. Two of the programs, Court Specialized Treatment and Access to Recovery Services (CO-STARS) and Get Off the Streets (GOTS), began in late 2006, while the other, Communities Uniting Rainier Beach (CURB), began in 2008. Each of these programs is relatively small, emphasizes close and intensive relations with its clients, provides extensive case management services, and employs peer specialists. In these ways, the programs adopt an “Assertive Community Treatment” (ACT) approach.

Our assessment is guided by a large literature that evaluates diversion programs, particularly those that adopt ACT principles. This literature suggests that such programs often generate modest reductions in criminal justice involvement and can generate overall savings or be cost-neutral, particularly when health care cost reductions are considered.

Our analysis rests upon an extensive body of qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative components consist largely of interviews with program staff and clients, and with police officials, community members, and others with some association with these programs. These data enabled an assessment of each program’s operations and of their impacts, as perceived by program staff, program participants, and community stakeholders. We used the qualitative data to illuminate patterns that emerged from the quantitative analysis and to gain insight into program operations and client experiences. The quantitative components are of two parts. The first consists of program enrollment and expenditure data. These data allowed us to describe patterns in the distribution of program resources and in the duration of client experiences in each program. The second consists of data from the King County Jail that outlined the booking history and jail days for each program client dating to 2001. These data included the number and dates of all bookings, the number and offense category for each booking charge, and the length of sentence. These data enabled us to describe patterns in criminal justice involvement from up to five years before program entry.

Our findings are many and vary by program (see Section V). Principal findings include the following:

1. Each program is tailored to a specific population, pursues productive relations with other agencies and key community members, and effectively uses case management services to generate resources and opportunities for clients.

2. Clients in each program reduce their criminal justice involvement in some fashion, although in a manner that differs across the programs. CO-STARS clients see a 30 percent reduction in jail bookings and a 7 percent increase in jail days, GOTS clients a 26 percent reduction in jail bookings and a 13 percent reduction in jail days, and CURB clients an 11 percent increase in jail bookings and a 29 percent decrease in jail days.
3. For each program, and especially for GOTS and CURB, post-entry criminal offending is concentrated in a small number of clients. When these clients are excluded from the analysis, reductions in jail usage for these two programs exceed 70 percent.
4. Program graduates see a particularly striking reduction in jail usage. For CO-STARS and GOTS, duration in a program is strongly correlated with a reduction in jail days, although jail days increase for many clients in the period after entry.
5. Although program clients do not reduce jail usage to a degree that would generate a cost savings sufficient to offset expenditures to the programs by the City, program staff distribute more than 80 percent of their discretionary resources toward the 90 percent of individuals who demonstrate the greatest declines in jail days.

These findings help inform the following five recommendations:

***1. Program performance to date is sufficiently strong to merit continued support from the City of Seattle.***

Program staff tailor their efforts to their specific clientele and generate substantial additional resources through their case management services. Further, they direct program resources effectively to those clients who demonstrate the most significant reductions in jail usage. Program clients see reductions in criminal justice involvement in line with those demonstrated by similar programs nationwide.

***2. Funding should occur over longer intervals.***

The uncertainty of continued funding reduces program effectiveness. This uncertainty should be reduced or eliminated.

***3. It would be advisable to increase formal connections between these programs and the criminal justice system.***

Many program clients receive extensive sentences after program entry because of violations of pre-existing conditional releases. Because program duration coincides with

a reduction in jail usage, it would be beneficial for court and Department of Corrections officials to consistently be aware of client enrollment when violations occur.

***4. It would be advisable to clarify expectations of performance for these programs.***

These are simultaneously public safety and human services programs, which creates some uncertainty about how best to evaluate them. We urge city officials and program staff to reconsider the metrics currently used to measure program performance.

***5. Individual programs should make more specific changes in accordance with some of our findings.***