

Eckerd Wilderness Educational System

Evaluation Report - Fiscal Year 2004
NORTH CAROLINA



Improving The Future, One Child At A Time

Eckerd Wilderness Educational System Evaluation Report (FY 2004)

Introduction

As a condition of program expansion in the 1998 Juvenile Reform Act, the North Carolina General Assembly requires annual evaluations of many of the programs that are approved for funding.

This report will examine the North Carolina Eckerd Wilderness Educational System by looking at:

- Services provided to the clients
- Demographics of those served
- Behavioral changes and academic growth of youth while in the programs
- Follow-up evaluation of the programs' long-range impact
- Cost benefits to the state

Services Provided

The North Carolina Eckerd programs serve boys and girls, ages 10 through 16, with behavioral, emotional and delinquency problems. The Eckerd Wilderness Educational System offers year-round, staff-secure, residential therapeutic programs, providing an alternative to more restrictive settings. Counselor-teachers live with the youth in groups of ten that are designed to promote self-esteem, personal responsibility, problem-solving skills, communication skills, and self-discipline. Group activities are the medium for problem-solving and interpersonal skill development. Youth learn immediate cause and effect relationships as they live with the natural consequences of their own decisions, choices, and behaviors.

Experiential education and individual instruction promote positive attitudes towards learning while strengthening basic skills. Youth earn educational credits during the program and are assisted with reentry into public schools. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accredits the North Carolina programs as experiential learning centers. In addition, each program is also fully accredited by the Council on Accreditation and licensed by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Family workers provide ongoing services to the parents while their children are enrolled in the program. These services are directed toward strengthening parental skills and abilities to influence their child's learning, improving their capacity to provide a positive home environment, and connecting with community resources. The family worker is the liaison between programs and the family and provides counseling, crisis intervention, and case management services. In most locations, family workers also facilitate parent groups.

Youth Profile

Youth who enter EYA North Carolina programs come with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge. They are often absent from school in the months prior to admission due to truancy, suspension, or expulsion. They have difficulty with anger management, verbalizing their thoughts and feelings, and self-esteem. Relationships with their families, peers, and adults in authority are often difficult for them. They tend to rebel against rules and structure, some by running away, some through aggression, and some by withdrawing emotionally. They arrive at the programs unhappy with themselves and troubling to others. With all of this in mind, it is EYA's goal to help youth move to a better place in their lives, through treatment and understanding.

Fiscal Year 2004

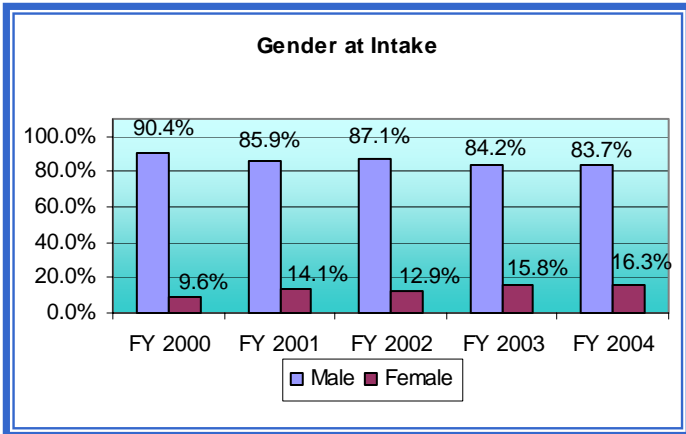
In FY 2004, 416 of the youth that entered EYA North Carolina programs were funded by the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. EYA's fiscal year runs from July 1, 2003 through June 30, 2004.

Demographics at Intake

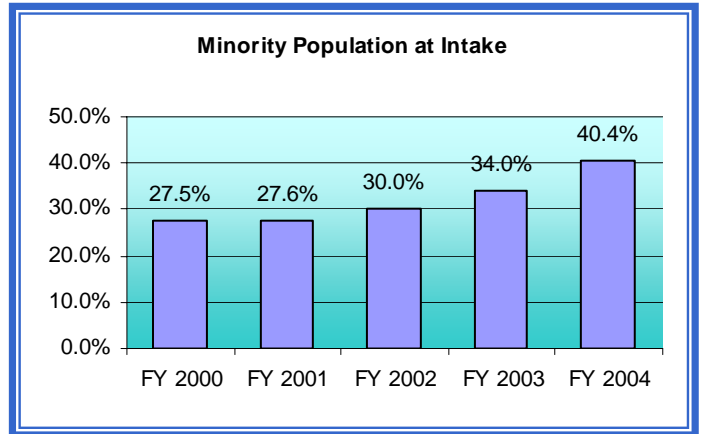
Youth who entered EYA North Carolina programs had the following characteristics at intake:

- Average age of 14.5, average grade level of 7.9 and average IQ of 88.6
- 59.9% were 14 or 15 years of age and 80.8% were in the seventh, eighth, or ninth grade
- 43.8% came from single parent homes

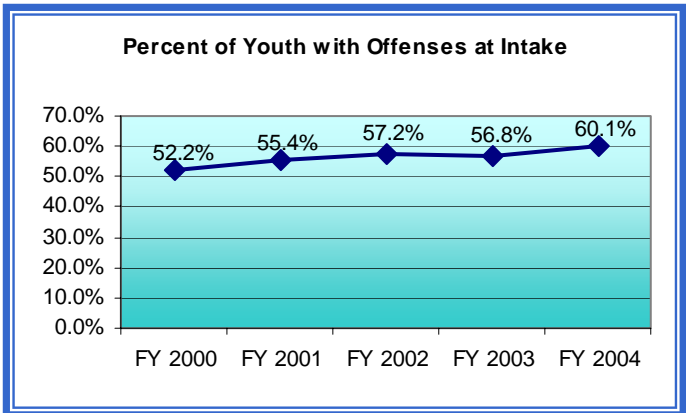
- 9.7% came from homes where no parent was present
- 25.2% were identified as having substance abuse issues, 21.6% had parents who abused alcohol and/or drugs and 11.8% have had at least one parent incarcerated
- 35.6% were classified as special education students



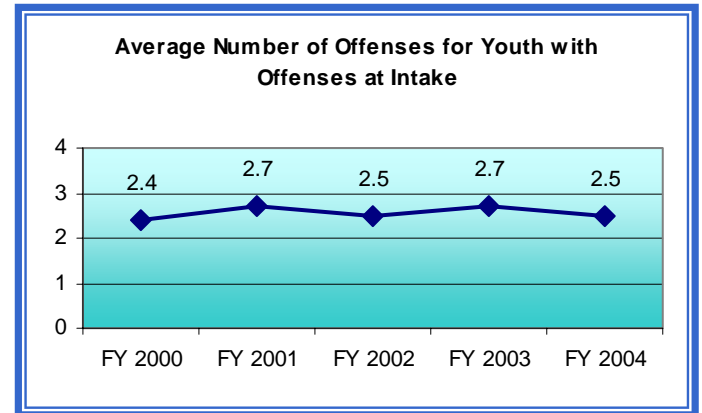
The percentage of females (16.3%) is the highest in the last five years.



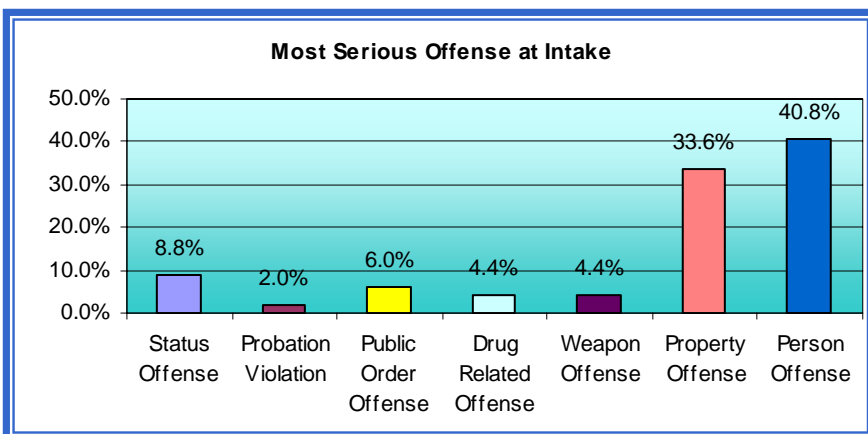
The percentage of minority youth has increased over the last five years from 27.5% in FY 2000 to 40.4% in FY 2004.



The percentage of youth with offenses in FY 2004 increased to 60.1%, the highest rate in five years.



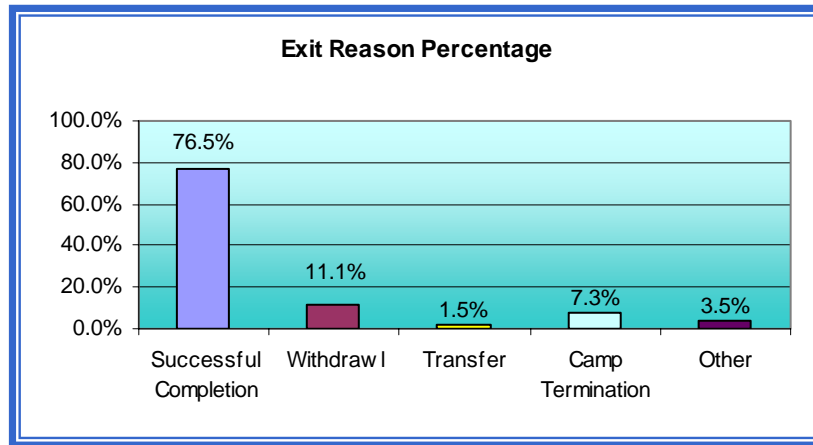
The average number of offenses for youth with at least one adjudication have remained consistent over the last five years.



Of youth with offenses at intake, 74.4% have person or property offenses. Youth with person offenses accounted for 40.8%, while 33.6% of youth had property offenses as their most serious crime.

Exit Information

Of the 396 youth exiting programs in FY 2004, 76.5% successfully completed their identified treatment goals and objectives. The average length of stay for all graduates was 10.7 months. This was slightly higher than last year's average length of stay of 10.5 months.

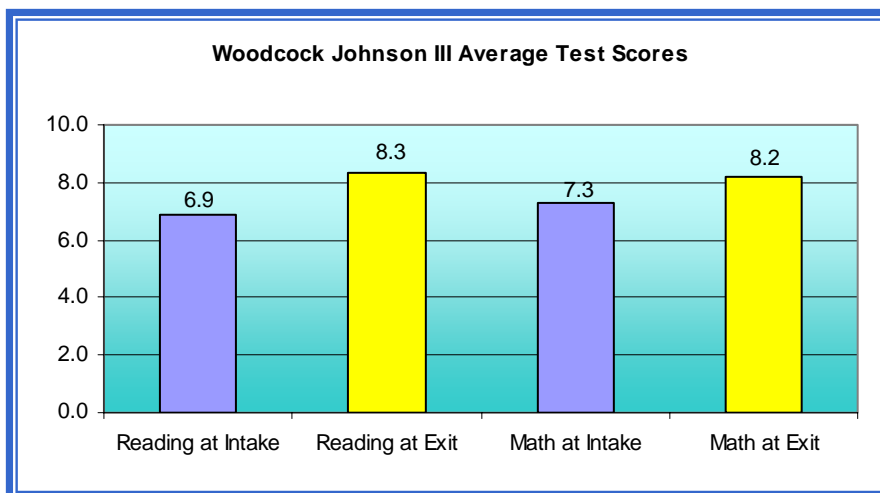


Behavioral Changes

The Piers Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale is a brief, self-report test designed to aid in the assessment of self-concept in youth. Eckerd programs use all aspects of the Piers Harris for assessment purposes when developing individual treatment plans. The Piers Harris is comprised of an 80-item self-report questionnaire designed to determine how youth feel about themselves. The single most reliable measure for the Piers Harris and the one with the best research support is the total score. An increase in total score from pre-test to post-test indicates gains in self-esteem. For FY 2004 the average pre-test total score was 53.4, the average post-test total score was 59.8 and the overall average percentage gain from pre-test to post-test was 14.9%.

Academic Growth

The North Carolina contract provides that youth served by Eckerd show progress in academic achievement while assigned to a program. The experiential learning component that is built into all aspects of the program is designed to ensure that youth do not lose ground when they return to their home schools. The Woodcock Johnson - III Tests of Achievement is used to measure academic progress in reading and math. Scores indicate the pre-test and post-test scores in terms of grade placement. The graph below indicates that students advanced an average of 1.4 grade levels in reading and .9 grade levels in math during their stay.



Long Range Benefits at 6 and 12 Months Follow-up

North Carolina Successful Completers from July 1, 2002–June 30, 2003

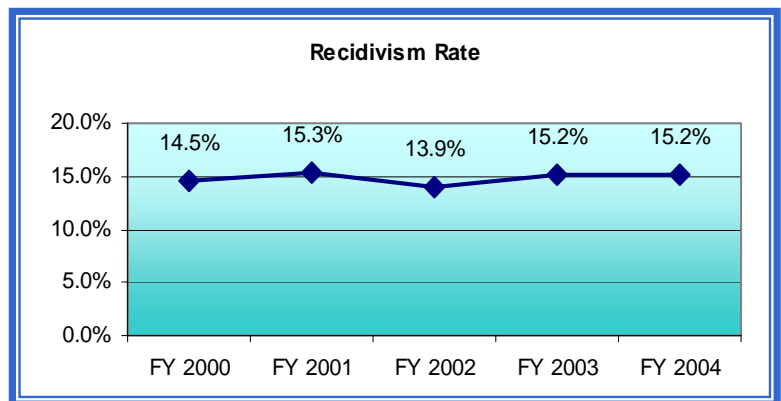
The annual contract between the North Carolina Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc., requires Eckerd to conduct follow up evaluations at 6-month and 12-month intervals on each successful completer. The most recent follow-up report shows the 6-month and 12-month contact with successful completers from FY 2003. Data was collected at 6-month follow-up for 315 graduates and at 12-month follow-up on 284 graduates. This report provides a summary of living status, subsequent delinquency, mental health services and educational/vocational status for youth who complete their program.

Living Status at 6 and 12-Months Post-Service	6-Months	12-Months
Two Parent Home—Biological and/or Adoptive	20.0%	16.2%
Single Parent	42.2%	41.2%
Parent and Step—Parent or Partner	21.6%	21.8%
Relative	9.5%	10.6%
Foster Home or Group Home	1.9%	3.2%
Other*	4.8%	7.0%

*Other is defined as Independent Living, Living with a Friend, Mental Health Placement or Delinquency Placement.

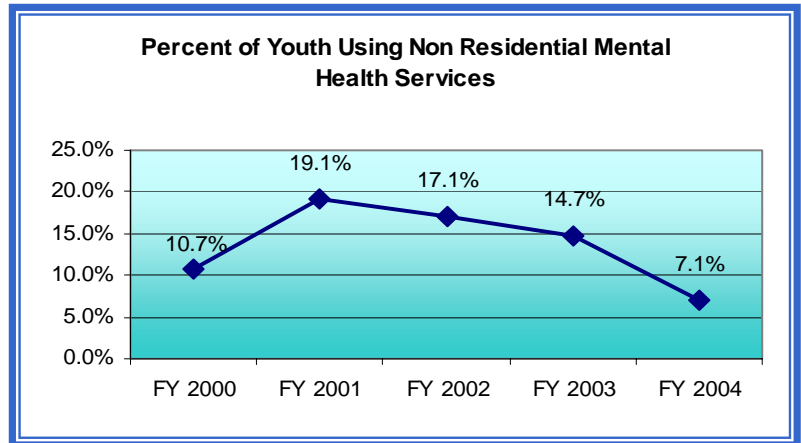
Subsequent Delinquency within 12-Months of Successful Completion	
Recidivism Percentage of youth convicted of any new offense or technical violation in either juvenile or adult court	15.2%
Post-Service Supervision Percentage of youth on probation or under court ordered supervision	6.8%
Post-Service Placement Percentage of youth placed in a residential setting as or more restrictive than the program	5.2%

Over the last five years, the recidivism rate has remained stable, although the percentage of youth with offenses at intake continues to increase.

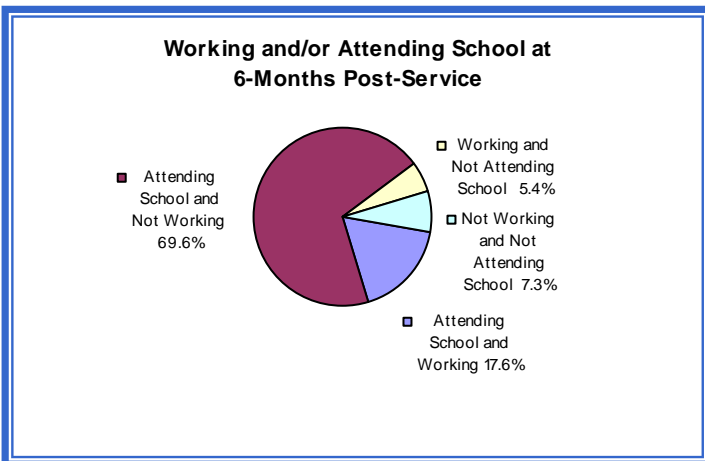


Mental Health Services within 12-Months of Successful Completion	
Mental Health Service - Residential Percentage of youth utilizing residential mental health services	4.0%
Mental Health Service - Non-residential Percentage of youth utilizing non-residential mental health services	7.1%

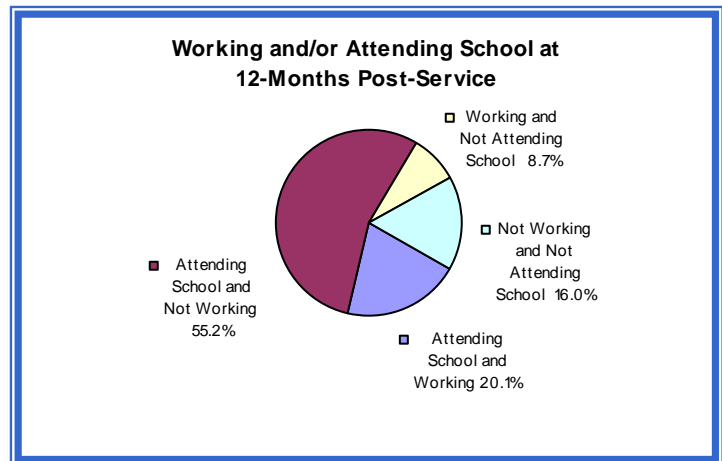
The percentage of youth using non-residential mental health services any-time during the 12-month follow-up period has slowly declined over the last three fiscal years, reaching a low of 7.1% in FY 2004.



Educational/Vocational Status at 6 and 12-Months Post-Service	6-Months	12-Months
Percentage youth working and/or attending school. Youth in a delinquency placement at the post-service period are not included.	92.7%	84.0%



At 6-months post-service 92.7% of youth who successfully completed their program were working and/or attending school.



At 12-months post-service 84.0% of youth who successfully completed their programs were working and/or attending school.

Cost Benefit

Youth made significant gains while in programs and adjusted well once they returned to their families and communities. The cost per day for a youth served in Eckerd programs for FY 2004 was \$100.54 with an average length of stay for graduates of 10.7 months. To assess the relative value of this program, please refer to the juvenile justice residential costs comparison chart below. (Cost comparison data of non-Eckerd programs reflect FY 2004 data obtained from the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.)

Residential Cost Comparison

Program Type	Daily Cost/Per Diem
Eckerd Programs	\$100.54
Secure Detention	\$147.00
Youth Development Centers	\$174.00

Summary and Conclusions

This report reviewed the Eckerd Wilderness Educational System that is operated under contract between the North Carolina Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc., a private not-for-profit provider headquartered in Clearwater, Florida.

Conclusions that are supported by this evaluation are:

1. The programs serve a high-risk group of youth whose behavior makes them likely candidates for further behavior and delinquency problems.
2. Based on pre-tests and post-tests, the programs have a positive impact on the social skills, academic achievement and basic attitudes of the youth served.
3. Follow-up evaluation shows that these behavior and attitude changes are resulting in long-range improvements for the youth served.
4. The changed behaviors are resulting in cost savings to the state in fewer youth development center and mental health placements.

The Eckerd programs are providing a clearly beneficial service. As one of the few residential alternatives available to all of the juvenile courts as an Intermediate Sanction the Eckerd programs are filling an important need in North Carolina's Juvenile Justice System.



Improving the Future, One Child at a Time

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Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc. strictly adheres to a policy of nondiscrimination in the admission of youth without regard to race, religion, color, sex, handicap, age or national origin. Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc. is an equal opportunity employer.

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