

# Program Evaluation: Georgia's Transitional Center Program



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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide a mixed mode program evaluation of Georgia's Offender Reentry Transitional Center Program by considering programming, characteristics, and recidivism outcomes of inmates who were released in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008. The data included offenders' last facility, race, and gender and birth year. The results showed statistical significance in inmates released from Georgia's Transitional Center Program during the study years; however, those rates were comparable to that of inmates who started and successfully completed probation. The statistical significance between Probation and Transitional Center outcomes are related to three commonalities: the programs and facilities were community-based; pre-release planning programs were afforded to all participants; and employment is required of all participants during their incarceration. The findings and recommendations from this research could be useful to the contextual knowledge of offender reentry by focusing on the effect of participation in transitional centers and other community based institutions on recidivism.

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## Introduction

Offender reentry refers to the issues and programs related to the reintegration of prisoners to the community. Reentering prisoners face a range of challenges that can inhibit their efforts to reintegrate as functioning community members and avoid recidivism. These challenges include housing, employment, drug and alcohol addiction, health problems and access to healthcare, and family reunification (National Crime Prevention Council 2009). Progress has been made in addressing these barriers; however, recidivism rates continue to climb due to a lack of focus on offender success as the desired outcome of correctional efforts, lack of consensus on the transitional programming in prison and the community, and fragmentation among the correctional agencies and stakeholders involved in managing transition (National Institute of Corrections 2010a).

In the United States at least 95 percent of state prisoners will return to the community at some point. At the end of 2011, state and federal prison authorities had jurisdiction over 1,598,780 prisoners which represents a decrease of .9 percent from the previous year (Carson and Sabol 2012). The decline is significant because it is the second consecutive decline observed in the population since the Bureau of Justice Statistics began reporting this population in 1980.

Nationally, the rate of offenders being released to the community has increased drastically. In 1980, 144,000 individuals were released back to their communities from state prisons; by 2008 that number had more than quadrupled to 683,106 (Cortes and Rogers 2010). Many studies of transitional or halfway house programs have been conducted, but few have employed strong methodological designs based on reentry initiatives. Second, literature on offender reentry barriers is replete; however, more research is needed to further examine the effectiveness of participation in transitional centers prior to release in preventing recidivism. Third, there is limited research on transitional center programming to address criminogenic needs such as education, employment, housing, substance abuse, mental health, and family support. Lastly, although GDOC's transitional centers are the preferred method of preparing offenders for returning to the community, there is limited space available and the centers are not located in geographically centralized locations.

The primary focus of this study was to provide an in-depth mixed mode program evaluation through case study analysis of Georgia's Offender Reentry Transitional Center Program. The study design was selected based on the prevalence of case studies in practice-oriented disciplines such as public administration (Rudenstam and Newton 2007, 50). Case studies have been referred to by Stake (1995) as "specific, unique bounded systems" due to the focuses on a

single individual, organization, event, program, or process. The main research approaches in this case study are examination of archival records and responses to interviews or questionnaires. These approaches are most commonly used in the qualitative research (Rudentam and Newton 2007, 51). The following research questions are addressed:

Q1. What are the characteristics of the program participants released in FY 2006, 2007, and 2008?

Q2. What is the relationship and statistically significant difference between recidivism rates among transitional center program participants and offenders released from other institutions in FY 2006, 2007, and 2008?

Q3. What is the relationship statistically significant difference in recidivism rates among transitional center program participants and offenders released from other institutions from 2001 to 2005 and 2006 to 2009?

Q4. What prerelease programming was provided to program participants released in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008?

### **Case Study – Georgia Department of Corrections’ Transitional Center Program**

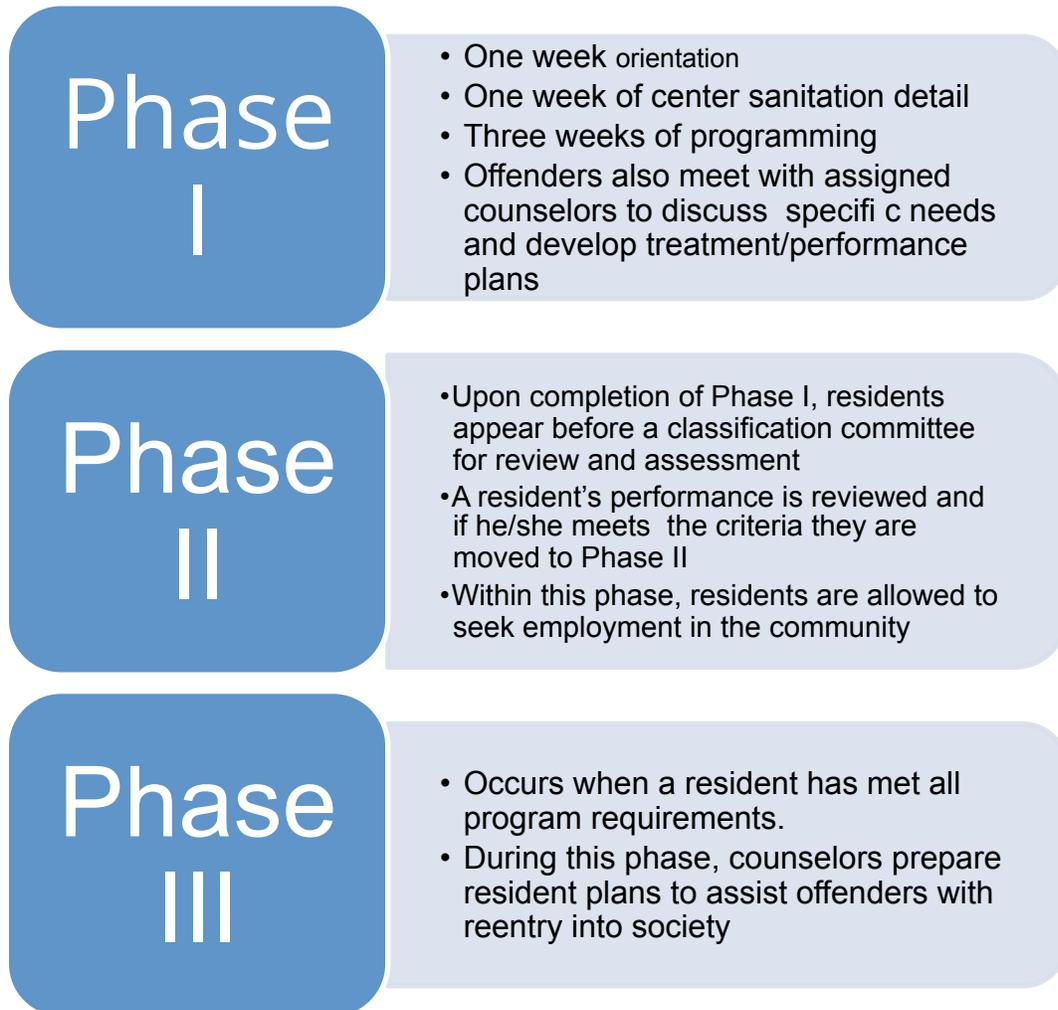
There are currently 57,288 inmates in Georgia’s prisons (GDOC, 2012). In 2010, Georgia had the fifth largest state prison population with 56,432 inmates behind California (165,062), Texas (173,649), Florida (104,306), and New York (56,656) (Guerino, Harrison, and Sabol 2011). Approximately 20,000 to 23,000 inmates enter Georgia’s prisons each year; however, only 18,000 to 19,000 inmates are released annually. This results in an increase in the prison population of at least 2,000 inmates each year (Sabree 2007).

The Georgia Department of Corrections (hereafter GDOC) primary reentry goals are to help each offender become a productive member of society by linking the offenders with programs and services necessary for successful transition and reentry into the community. Additionally, GDOC seeks to enhance public safety by reducing recidivism among the formerly incarcerated population and promoting public safety through collaborative partnerships that support offender transition to the community (GDOC 2012a).

To prepare offenders for reintegration into the community the GDOC utilizes transitional centers for medium and minimum security level inmates. GDOC has 15 transitional centers. Two of the centers are designated for women. There are a total of 2,986 transitional center beds available with 347 beds for female offenders (GDOC 2012a). Inmates are referred to the Transitional Center Program by either the State Board of Pardons and Paroles or the prison staff based on criminal history, behavior while incarcerated, and a number of other factors. These factors include criminal history (i.e., types of offenses and recidivism risks), behavior while incarcerated, and a referral from the case manager. Transitional centers offer a work release program that secures employment for offenders' prior to reentry to the community. On average, inmates participate in the Transitional Center Program from six to twelve months. While in the program they participate in programs and contribute to the upkeep of their respective center.

Transitional centers are the preferred method of preparing offenders for return to the community; however, there is a limited amount of space available in these centers and some inmates are ineligible due to their criminal histories. GDOC also utilizes "in house" transitional dormitories within existing state prisons for these types of offenders. Within 12 months of their actual maximum release date, inmates who are ineligible for transition center placement "are isolated from the rest of the prison population to receive intensive training, substance abuse treatment, education, job skills, and applicable reentry preparation" (GDOC 2012b).

The mission of the GDOC's Transitional Center Program is to "protect the public by providing community residential services to inmates prior to their discharge or parole from incarceration." (GDOC 2013). As previously mentioned, GDOC was accepted into Round 1 of the TPC initiative in 2004. GDOC's early target of change included expanding institutional programming in cognitive skills, substance abuse and vocational education; creating career centers within pre-release and transitional housing centers; and assisting offenders close to release with obtaining critical papers (drivers' licenses, social security, disability, veterans' benefits, etc.). As a result, GDOC expanded its Transitional Center Program to 15 facilities. Program participants complete three phases with Phase I providing a three week orientation (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** Georgia Offender Reentry Transitional Center Program Components

### **Research Question 1: What are the characteristics of the program participants released in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008?**

The current body of literature on offender reentry is often presented with offender characteristics which include last institution, race, gender, birth year, and education level, date of admission, date of release, offense county, residence county, and major offense type. In the current study, offender characteristics are presented in the following categories: last institution, race, gender, and birth year. These categories were utilized to assess the relationships between Transitional Center Program participants for FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008. Table 1 provides an overview of the study sample, an aggregate of offenders released from the Transitional Center Program in FY 2006 (n = 1,952); FY 2007 (n = 1,946); and FY 2008 (n = 1,948).

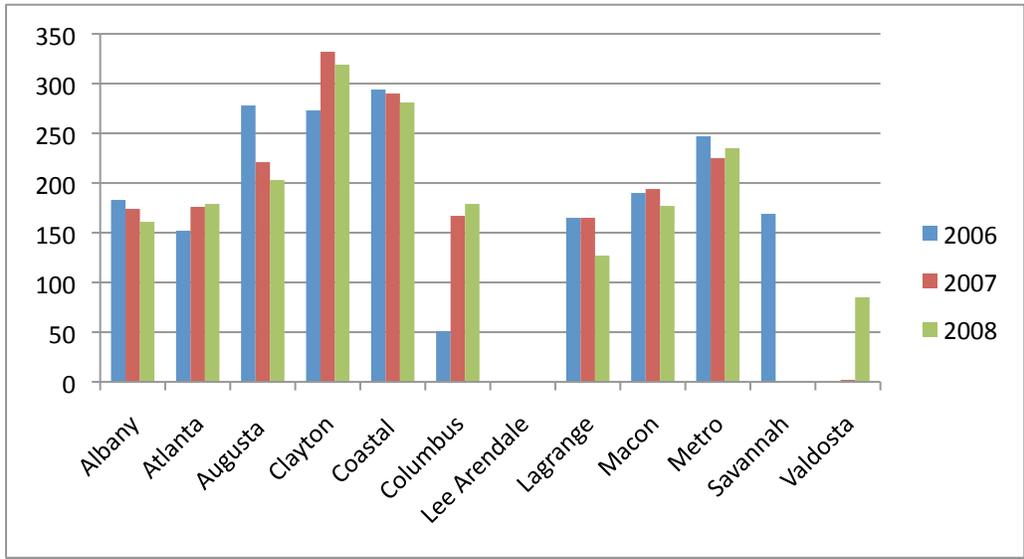
*Analysis.* In FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008 GDOC utilized eleven Transitional Center Programs to prepare offenders for return to the community. Coastal Transitional Center had the highest participation rate in 2006 (15%), and Clayton Transitional Center had the highest participation in 2007 (17%) and 2008 (16%), respectively (GDOC 2012). Lee Arrendale Transitional Center opened in 2008 and Valdosta opened in 2007. Figure 2 provides an overview of the participation levels for each facility.

The race and gender of participants in the Transitional Center Program is consistent with the ratios for the GDOC. In 2006, 70 percent of the participants were black and 68 percent were white. Males represented 87 percent of the participants while 13 percent were females. In 2007, 68 percent were black and 34 percent were white and in 2008, 65 percent were black and 36 percent were white. In 2007, males represented 90 percent of the population and 10 percent were female and in 2008, and 88 percent were male and 12 percent per female (GDOC 2012). The participant rate of black participants has decreased while the participation of white participants increased. Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and others represent less than 10 percent of the total population in the Transitional Center Program for each year (GDOC 2012). Gender characteristics have remained steady for each year. These race and gender characteristics are comparable to the national rates; however, the female incarceration rates are higher than the federal system (6.5 percent), and state and federal combined (6.7 percent) (Federal Bureau of Prisons 2013; Carson and Sabol 2013). Figure 3 provides an overview of the race of the participants and Figure 4 provides an overview of the gender for the participants for FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008.

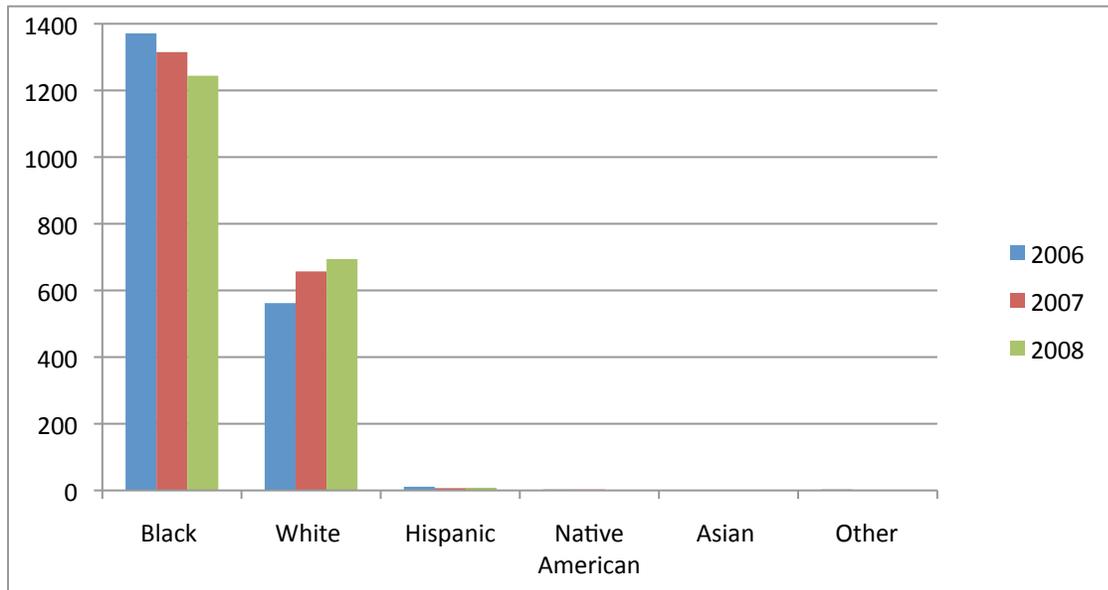
**Table 1** Characteristics of Offenders Released from the Transitional Center Program in FY2006, FY 2007, FY 2008.

Offender Characteristic	2006 (n = 1,952)	2007 (n = 1,946)	2008 (n = 1,948)
Last Facility	Albany 183 (9.38 %) Atlanta 152 (7.79%) Augusta 278 (14.24%) Clayton 273 (13.98%) Coastal 294 (15.06%) Columbus 51(2.61%) Lee Arrendale (NA) Lagrange 165 (8.45%) Macon 190 (9.73%) Metro 247 (12.65%) Savannah 169 (8.66%) Valdosta 0	Albany 174 (8.94%) Atlanta 176 (9.04%) Augusta 221 (11.36%) Clayton 332 (17.06%) Coastal 290 (14.90%) Columbus 167 (8.58%) Lee Arrendale (NA) Lagrange 165 (8.48%) Macon 194 (9.96%) Metro 225 (11.56%) Savannah 0 Valdosta 2 (.10%)	Albany 161(8.26%) Atlanta 179 (9.19%) Augusta 203(10.42%) Clayton 319 (16.37%) Coastal 281(14.42%) Columbus 179 (9.19%) Lee Arrendale (NA) Lagrange 127 (6.52%) Macon 177 (9.09%) Metro 235 (12.06%) Savannah 0 Valdosta 85 (4.36%)
Race	Black 1371 (70.24%) White 562 (28.79%) Hispanic 11 (.56%) Native American 3 (.15%) Asian 2 (.10%) Other 3 (.15%)	Black 1315 (67.57%) White 657 (33.76%) Hispanic 7 (.36%) Native American 3 (.15%) Asian 1(.05%) Other 1(.05%)	Black 1244 (63.86%) White 694 (35.63%) Hispanic 8 (.41%) Native American 1 (.05%) Asian 0 Other 2 (.10%)
Gender	Male 1705 (87.25%) Female 247 (12.65%)	Male 1755 (90.18%) Female 226 (11.61%)	Male 1714 (87.99%) Female 235 (12.06%)
Birth Year	Mode 1959 Median 1969 Min 1939 Max1988	Mode 1980 Median 1970 Min 1940 Max1988	Mode 1971 Median 1971 Min 1935 Max 1990

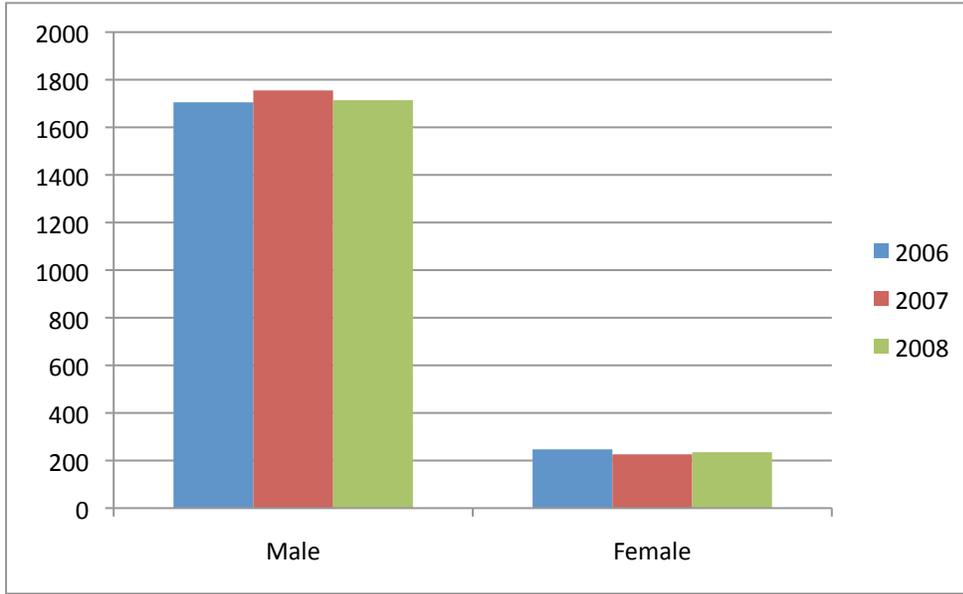
**Figure 2** Transitional Center Program Participation in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008.



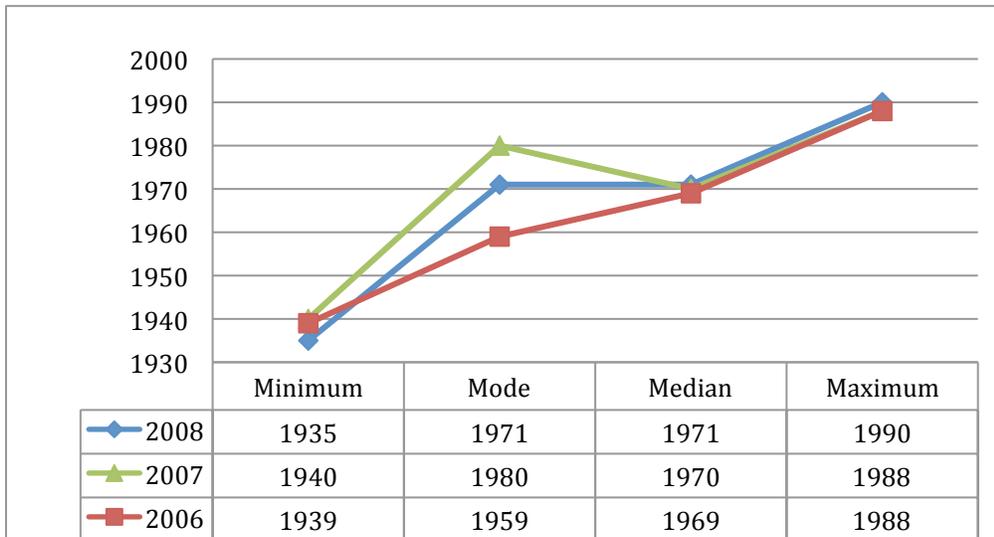
**Figure 3** Transitional Center Program Participant Race in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008



**Figure 4** Transitional Center Program Participant Gender in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008



**Figure 5** Transitional Center Program Participants Birth Years in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008



Additionally, the analysis of participants' birth years over the three year period shows birth year 1959 (age 47) as the mode, birth year 1969 (age 37) as the median, and birth year 1939 (age 67) as the minimum or least occurring birth year for 2006. In 2007, the birth year 1980 (age 26) was the mode, birth year 1970 (age 37) was the median, and birth year 1940 (age 67) was the minimum or least occurring birth year. In 2008, the birth year 1971 (age 37) was the mode, birth year 1971 (age 37) was the median, and birth year 1935 (age 73) was the minimum or least occurring birth year (GDOC 2012). Figure 5 provides an overview of the participants' birth years.

## **Research Question 2: What is the relationship and statistically significant difference between recidivism rates among transitional center program participants and offenders released from other institutions in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008?**

In this study, GDOC data was utilized to analyze recidivism trends. The recidivism rates of the sample (inmates released from the Transitional Center Program in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008) is incorporated in GDOC's three year reconviction rate for 2001 to 2009. Table 2 provides a comparison of inmates released from the Transitional Center Program and non-Transitional Center institutions for the same year (e.g., state prisons and county correctional facilities).

*Analysis.* During the study years 2001-2009 offenders who successfully completed Probation Supervision had the lowest overall reconviction rate ( $\bar{x}$  = 16.14). Offenders released from Transitional Centers had the second lowest reconviction rate during this time period ( $\bar{x}$  = 18.95), followed by Probation Supervision (Starting) ( $\bar{x}$  = 21.18). This is largely due to the similarity of these programs as they are community-based. Furthermore, offenders under probation supervision are non-custodial and are required to maintain employment and stable residence under the supervision of a probation officer (GDOC 2012).

**Table 2** GDOC Three Years Recidivism Rate 2001 to 2009

Year	County CI	Detention Centers	Diversion Centers	Private Prisons	Probation Boot Camp	Probation Supervision (starting)	Probation Supervision (success)	State Prison, Intensive Boot Camps	Transitional Centers
2001	27.32	24.84	24.88	31.91	28.95	18.98	14.88	28.99	21.38
2002	27.03	24.32	25.35	29.87	29.62	19.01	16.79	28.01	19.1
2003	27.7	24.34	23.48	25.74	29.97	18.45	16.93	27.7	20.38
2004	27.69	25.25	23.12	27.88	31.05	21.37	16.64	27.28	17.12
2005	28.44	25.97	26.32	29.14	33.42	23.06	16.14	27.66	17.5
2006	27.31	25.39	25.17	29.82	31.99	22.79	16.49	28.1	19.48
2007	26.95	25.61	24.89	30.22	35.9	21.77	15.63	26.97	18.05
2008	25.77	24.59	24.68	30.85	33.06	22.15	15.73	27.3	17.82
2009	26.61	25.43	26.24	27.81	31.72	23	16	27.45	19.73
<b>Means</b>	<b>27.20</b>	<b>25.08</b>	<b>24.90</b>	<b>29.25</b>	<b>31.74</b>	<b>21.18</b>	<b>16.14</b>	<b>27.72</b>	<b>18.95</b>
<b>Pearson's Correlation</b>	<b>-0.03</b>	<b>-0.42</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>-0.64</b>	<b>-0.56</b>	<b>-0.23</b>	<b>0.75</b>	
<b>T-test</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	

When Pearson's Correlation was used to analyze the data for 2001-2009, a strong positive ( $>.50, <1$ ) relationship was shown between State Prison Intensive Boot Camps (.75) and transitional centers. This was a surprising result since State Prison Intensive Boot Camps had the second highest recidivism rate. On the other hand, strong negative ( $< -.50, > -1$ ) relationships were shown between Probation Boot Camp (-.64) and Transitional Centers, and Probation Supervision (starting) (-.56), and Transitional Centers.

One-tailed t-tests were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences at the .05 alpha level between independent variables (county - CI, detention centers, diversion centers, private prisons, probation boot camps,

probation supervision (starting), probation supervision (success), and state prison intensive boot camps), and dependent variable (transitional centers) for 2001 to 2009. Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences at the .05 alpha level, between the use of transitional centers and each of the other correctional methods observed in this study.

### **Research Question 3: What is the statistically significant difference in recidivism rates among transitional center program participants and offenders released from other institutions from 2001 – 2005 and 2006 - 2009?**

*Analysis.* Inmates released from the Transitional Center Program in FY 2001-2005 had a reconviction rates that ranged from 16.28 to 30.60. The highest reconviction rate during this period was for inmates who were in Probation Boot Camps, while the lowest was for inmates who successfully completed Probation Supervision. Once again, the only noticeable positive correlation ( $>.50$ ) was between State Prison Intensive Boot Camps and Transitional Centers, which showed a correlation result of .81, even though this correctional method had the third highest average reconviction rate. Strong negative relationships were shown between Detention Centers and Transitional Centers ( $-.65$ ), Probation Boot Camps and Transitional Centers ( $-.78$ ), and Probation Supervision (starting) and Transitional Centers ( $-.83$ ). One-tailed t-test results for this period again showed that there were statistically significant differences at .05 alpha level, between the use of transitional centers and every other independent variable observed, except Probation Supervision (starting), which had a result of .27.

**Table 3** GDOC Reconviction Rates 2001 to 2005

Year	County CI	Detention Centers	Diversion Centers	Private Prisons	Probation Boot Camp	Probation Supervision (starting)	Probation Supervision (success)	State Prison, Intensive Boot Camps	Transitional Centers
2001	27.32	24.84	24.88	31.91	28.95	18.98	14.88	28.99	21.38
2002	27.03	24.32	25.35	29.87	29.62	19.01	16.79	28.01	19.1
2003	27.7	24.34	23.48	25.74	29.97	18.45	16.93	27.7	20.38
2004	27.69	25.25	23.12	27.88	31.05	21.37	16.64	27.28	17.12
2005	28.44	25.97	26.32	29.14	33.42	23.06	16.14	27.66	17.5
<b>Means</b>	<b>27.64</b>	<b>24.94</b>	<b>24.63</b>	<b>28.91</b>	<b>30.60</b>	<b>20.17</b>	<b>16.28</b>	<b>27.93</b>	<b>19.10</b>
<b>Pearson's Correlation</b>	<b>-0.53</b>	<b>-0.65</b>	<b>-0.06</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>-0.78</b>	<b>-0.83</b>	<b>-0.47</b>	<b>0.81</b>	
<b>T-test</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>0.00</b>	

**Table 4** GDOC Reconviction Rates 2006 to 2009

Year	County CI	Detention Centers	Diversion Centers	Private Prisons	Probation Boot Camp	Probation Supervision (starting)	Probation Supervision (success)	State Prison, Intensive Boot Camps	Transitional Centers
2006	27.31	25.39	25.17	29.82	31.99	22.79	16.49	28.1	19.48
2007	26.95	25.61	24.89	30.22	35.9	21.77	15.63	26.97	18.05
2008	25.77	24.59	24.68	30.85	33.06	22.15	15.73	27.3	17.82
2009	26.61	25.43	26.24	27.81	31.72	23	16	27.45	19.73
Mean	<b>26.66</b>	<b>25.26</b>	<b>25.25</b>	<b>29.68</b>	<b>33.17</b>	<b>22.43</b>	<b>15.96</b>	<b>27.46</b>	<b>18.77</b>
Correl	<b>0.55</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>-0.83</b>	<b>-0.73</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.68</b>	
T-tests	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	

*Analysis.* During the study years (2006 – 2009), offenders who successfully completed Probation Supervision had the lowest overall reconviction rate ( $\bar{x}$  = 15.96). Offenders released from Transitional Centers had the second lowest reconviction rate during this time period ( $\bar{x}$  = 18.77), followed by Probation Supervision (Starting) ( $\bar{x}$  = 22.24). Once again, these programs are similar in that they are community-based. Diversion Centers ( $\bar{x}$  = 25.25), Detention Centers ( $\bar{x}$  = 25.26), County CIs ( $\bar{x}$  = 26.66), and State Prisons ( $\bar{x}$  = 27.46) had higher reconviction rates. Diversion Centers, Detention Centers, and County CIs are community-based correctional settings; however offender reentry planning varies in these institutions. Offender participation in reentry program in State Institutions is dependent upon the offenders' risk assessment and sentence length (GDOC 2012). In contrast, the two correctional settings with the highest reconviction rates during the study years (2006-2009) were Private Prisons ( $\bar{x}$  = 29.68) and Probation Boot Camps ( $\bar{x}$  = 33.17). Higher reconviction rates in Private Prisons and Probation Boot Camps may be attributed to the lack of offender reentry programs and employment opportunities.

During 2006-2009 study years, correlation results indicated strong positive relationships for other independent variables, such as County CI (.55), Diversion Centers (.84), Probation Supervision (starting) (.93), Probation Supervision (success)

(.77), and State Prison Boot Camps (.68). A strong negative relationship was also indicated between Probation Bootcamps (-.73) and Transitional Centers.

One-tailed t-test results indicated that there were statistically significant differences at .05 alpha level, when each independent variable was measured against the dependent variable, transitional centers. These results may indicate that as more resources are placed into the use of transitional centers the differences in outcomes when measured against any other correctional method is significant.

#### **Research Question 4: What prerelease programming was provided to program participants released in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008?**

Participants in Georgia's transitional centers from FY 2006 to FY 2008 participated in a variety of pre-release programming including counseling, work release, and life skill training. The type of pre-release programming varied from institution to institution; however, most facilities provide the following: 1)

Employment/Vocational related such as work release, pre-release/job readiness, On the Job Training (OJT) (i.e., Custodial Maintenance, Food Service, Building Maintenance, Auto Repair/Maintenance, Landscaping, Laundry Services, Maintenance, Laundry, Barbering); 2) Counseling related such as individual therapeutic counseling, group therapy (i.e., Detours, Matrix), Thinking for a Change, family violence, Moral Recognition Therapy, 12-Step Group (i.e, Alcoholics/Narcotics Anonymous), Driving Under The Influence School; 3) Health related such as human reproductive anatomy and physiology, contraceptive, STD, HIV and risk reduction, stress management, male healthcare; 4) Character development such as the Fatherhood Program, parenting, financial planning, religious (various worship services, bible study, pastoral counseling); 5) Academics/Education related such as the General Education Diploma, adult basic education, literacy remedial,); and 6) Wellness related such as recreational physical fitness, family days, and sports.

#### **Conclusion**

This study identified GDOC's Transitional Center programming, characteristics, and recidivism outcomes of inmates who were released in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008. This time period was selected to compare outcomes in Georgia to other three-year recidivism studies and to capture recidivism trends at the commencement of Second Chance Act funding initiatives. As reflected above, inmates released from Georgia Transitional Centers during this time frame had lower reconviction rates; however, their reconviction was comparable to that of

inmates who successfully completed probation or participated in Detention Center programs. The outcomes among transitional centers and probation supervision programs are significant due to the location of these programs (community-based), offender participation in pre-release planning programs, and requirements for offenders to seek and maintain employment.

Critics of the case study method believe that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings. Others feel that the intense exposure to study of the case biases the findings. Some dismiss case study research as useful only as an exploratory tool. Yet researchers continue to use the case study research method with success in carefully planned and crafted studies of real-life situations, issues, and problems. Reports on case studies from many disciplines are widely available in the literature (Yin 1994, 2003).

The case study approach was used to further understanding of evidence-based practices in Georgia. Specifically, offenders who participated in the Georgia's Transitional Center Program are 11 percent less likely than general population releases to return to prison within three years after release (Hunter, Braucht, and Prevost 2007). As a result of the TPC model, GDOC has significantly expanded the Transitional Center Program. There are fifteen transitional centers, including two for women. There are a total of 2,986 transitional center beds available with 347 beds for female offenders. The daily cost to house an offender in a transitional center is off-set by the offender's contribution to their room and board provided by the State. In addition, offenders on work release contribute to the local tax base and to their families' support. Georgia's experience provides a good example of how measurement can be used not only to track progress, but to encourage it (Hunter, Braucht, and Prevost 2007).

Overall, the expansion of the Transitional Center Program has positively contributed to GDOC's goals for transitional pre-release planning and programs. The Program has a utilization rate of 104 percent. Furthermore, the employment rate of Transitional Center Program participants is 84 percent. Lastly, the State of Georgia has received \$4.28 million toward operational expenses from participants' earnings.

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