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### **Life of crime follows most youths out of group probation homes**

Roughly seven years after entering such facilities in L.A. County, 66% said they had done something illegal within the past year, and 37% reported being rearrested, a study finds.

By Garrett Therolf  
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March 23, 2009

Most children who enter group probation homes in Los Angeles County remain in lives of crime and drugs years later, according to a new Rand Corp. study.

The bleak findings indicate a need to revamp the county's juvenile justice programs and increase funding, according to the report published in the April issue of the American Journal of Public Health.

"We cannot say that these group homes failed to improve anyone's life, but the large number of poor outcomes we observed raises questions about whether the juvenile justice system is as effective in rehabilitating delinquent youths as it should be," said Rajeev Ramchand, the study's lead author.

The think tank's researchers began tracking nearly 450 youths who entered group homes in 1999 and 2000. The final survey, taken in 2007, located 395 of the original participants and found that 66% said they had done something illegal, other than using alcohol or drugs, in the previous year.

Thirty-seven percent reported being arrested within the previous year, and 25% had been in jail or prison every day for the previous 90 days. Female participants were less likely than male respondents to report recent criminal behavior.

Among those who had spent at least one day free in the community in the previous 90 days, 29% said they had recently driven under the influence, and 26% said they had committed simple assaults.

Thirty-six percent of respondents reported recent hard drug use, and 27% reported five or more symptoms of substance dependence. The mortality rate was five times the rate of young people in the general population.

The study also reported several bright spots. About one-fifth of the participants reported they were not criminally active or in jail. Among the 395, 58% had graduated from high school or obtained a GED, and 63% reported working at a job in the previous year.

Each of the group homes that housed the young people in the study sample offered a range of services, including schooling, substance abuse treatment or education, family therapy, vocational training and other forms of counseling.

Robert Taylor, who heads Los Angeles County's probation department, said in a statement to The Times: "We know that some group homes do not provide the kinds of services this population needs, and that is why there are fewer group homes today than there were when this population was in group homes 10 years ago."

Still, at any given time about 3,000 youths continue to be assigned to probation group homes.

*Life of crime follows most youths out of group probation homes – Los Angeles Times March 23, 2009*

## **Letters to the Editor**

March 26, 2009

Inside Group Homes

Re: Study: Group homes' results mixed

The Times reports that a Rand Corp. study finds group homes fail to rehabilitate most delinquents and that its lead author therefore questions the effectiveness of the "juvenile justice system."

The juvenile justice system works with delinquents not just while they're in group care but many years after they've departed.

This distinction is often ignored: How can group homes be responsible for outcomes years after they are no longer responsible for a youth's care? Repeated requests for funding to deliver aftercare services to the youth after they leave group care have so far been disregarded.

Group homes continue to play a vital role in the juvenile justice system's continuum of care, offering a broad array of services.

Bruce Saltzer

Los Angeles

The writer is executive director of the Assn. of Community Human Service Agencies.

The underlying causes of why children remain in lives of crime and drugs were not addressed adequately in your article.

Over the last 10 years the length of stay in a group home has decreased from 6.1 months in 1999 to 3.5 months, primarily because of funding limitations.

Young men return to the same, often bleak situations that were responsible for their assignment in a group home in the first place. Professional and competent group homes such as ours can only do so much in the short period of time that youth are under our roofs.

Clayton L. Downey

Baldwin Park

The writer is president and chief executive of Ettie Lee Youth and Family Services, which operates nine group homes for at-risk youth.

*Letters to the editor – Los Angeles Times March, 23, 2009*

*Ettie Lee Youth & Family Services is a nonprofit child welfare agency serving the complex needs of at-risk youth who have been abused, neglected or abandoned. Its mission is to assist troubled youth who are in need of guidance and support to develop values and skills that will facilitate their success in life. Ettie Lee complies with the highest standards of Community Care Licensing, Los Angeles County Department of Children & Family Services, and Los Angeles County Department of Probation. Ettie Lee is accredited by the California Alliance for Children & Families and the Council on Accreditation.*