

A STUDY OF THE COMMUNITY BASED CLASSIFICATION BOARDS
OCTOBER-DECEMBER, 1976

AN INTERIM REPORT

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ABSTRACT

A special community-based classification board was in operation from October to December, 1976 for the purpose of reviewing inmates who were eligible to be transferred to a community based correctional program from each of the four major correctional facilities (MCI-Walpole, MCI-Concord, MCI-Norfolk, and MCI-Bridgewater). A total of 321 individuals were reviewed by the board during this three month period and were either recommended to the Commissioner for transfer to a lower security facility (46.1% of the sample) or were denied by the board or by the Commissioner's office for transfer at that time (53.9% of the sample).

A high proportion (88.5%) of the 148 individuals approved for placement were, in fact, placed into community based facilities and those individuals had a success rate of 71.0%. Of the 173 individuals rejected for transfer to a lower security facility, 113 (65.3%) were actually transferred to a community based facility during the six month follow-up period. Their success rate was 77.0%, which was even higher than for those actually approved for placement. For the entire sample, therefore, the failure rate was only 22.1%, reflecting 54 failures out of 244 individuals reclassified to lower security facilities. Since previous research in Massachusetts pre-release facilities have shown failure rates to range between 30% and 50%, it was concluded that the community based classification board was successful in placing individuals into community based facilities during that period.

INTRODUCTION

From October to December, 1976, a special Community-Based Classification Board was in operation to review inmates who were eligible to be transferred from each of the four major correctional facilities (MCI-Walpole, MCI-Concord, MCI-Norfolk or MCI-Bridgewater) to a community based correctional program. During this three month period, a total of 321 individuals were processed by the Board with a recommendation either to remain in their present institution or to be transferred to a lower security community-based facility. The final decision was made by the Commissioner who either approved or denied the recommendation of the Classification Board. As a result of this review process, an individual could be approved by the Board for transfer to a community facility, denied for transfer by the Board, or approved for transfer by the Board and then denied by the Commissioner (which in any case constituted a denial).

As can be seen in Table I, of the 321 individuals who appeared before the institutional boards, 209 (65.1%) were recommended to the Commissioner as suitable for transfer to a lower security facility. The remaining 112 people (34.9%) were rejected by the Board for transfer to a community based placement at that time. Of the 209 individuals recommended to the Commissioner for placement, 61 (29.2%) were denied transfer to the community based facility as recommended by the institutional boards.

Therefore, for the period of October-December, 1976, of a total of 321 individuals reviewed by the Community Based Boards at the major institutions, 148 (46.1%) were approved for transfer to a community based facility. A total of 173 individuals were denied transfer at that time for a total rejection rate of 53.9% (34.9% rejected by the Board and 19.0% rejected by the Commissioner). A breakdown of the number of individuals approved and rejected by each institution is presented in Table I.

TABLE I
CLASSIFICATION DECISION

<u>SPECIFIC COMMUNITY BOARD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
MCI CONCORD		
Rejected by board	51	(46.4)
Rejected by Commissioner	17	(15.5)
Approved	42	(38.2)
TOTAL	110	(100.0)
MCI WALPOLE		
Rejected by board	21	(33.3)
Rejected by Commissioner	15	(23.8)
Approved	27	(42.9)
TOTAL	63	(100.0)
MCI NORFOLK		
Rejected by board	13	(15.3)
Rejected by Commissioner	16	(18.8)
Approved	56	(65.9)
TOTAL	85	(100.0)
MCI BRIDGEWATER		
Rejected by board	27	(42.9)
Rejected by Commissioner	13	(20.6)
Approved	23	(36.5)
TOTAL	63	(100.0)
TOTAL		
Rejected by board	112	(34.9)
Rejected by Commissioner	61	(19.0)
Approved	148	(46.1)
TOTAL	321	(100.0)

Although a denial by the Commissioner was seldom accompanied by specific written commentary or explanation, there were several reasons given by the Board when an individual was denied transfer to a community based facility. These reasons can be grouped and summarized as follows:

- 1) An individual had a poor attitude, refused therapy, had no motivation, or had no desire to be transferred.
- 2) An individual had previous failures at pre-release or parole, had problems dealing with the responsibilities of pre-release, had a poor work history, or a poor adjustment in the community.
- 3) An individual had a poor disciplinary record, too many disciplinary reports or outstanding warrants.
- 4) An individual was judged to be a security risk due to prior escapes or years of previous criminal activity.
- 5) An individual needed more counseling, was emotionally unstable, had psychiatric problems, or needed a longer time in a stable institutional setting.
- 6) An individual had a drug or alcohol problem and needed to continue therapy.
- 7) An individual had previous sex offenses.
- 8) An individual requested transfer out-of-state.
- 9) An individual didn't meet the time criteria to be eligible for transfer to a community-based facility.
- 10) An individual was almost eligible for parole.
- 11) An individual was positively involved in programs or needed to complete a course at his present institution.

As can be seen from the above reasons, a denial for transfer to a community-based facility by the Community Based Boards was not always for a negative reason. Although reasons #1 through #7 reflected prior failures or improper conduct, reasons #8 and #9 can be considered neutral reasons. In this same light, reasons #10 and #11, to be almost eligible for parole or to be positively involved in a program, can only be classified as positive reasons. Therefore, a denial by the Community Based

Boards did not always have negative connotations.

A distribution of the reasons for denial of the 112 individuals rejected by the Community Based Boards for transfer to lower security is presented in Table II below.

TABLE II
REASON FOR REJECTION BY BOARD

<u>REASON</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
1) No motivation	12	(10.7)
2) Previous Failures	14	(12.5)
3) Poor Disciplinary record	22	(19.6)
4) Security Risk	8	(7.1)
5) Emotional Instability	9	(8.0)
6) Drug or Alcohol Problem	20	(17.9)
7) Prior Sex Offenses	1	(0.9)
8) Requests transfer out-of-state	1	(0.9)
9) Doesn't Meet Time Criteria	5	(4.5)
10) Almost eligible for parole	5	(4.5)
11) Positive Involvement at present Institution	15	(13.4)
TOTAL	112	(100.0)

It can be seen from this table that 26 individuals, or 23.2% of those rejected by the Board were rejected for a non-negative reason (reasons #8-11).

FINDINGS

For purposes of this analysis, the total sample was divided into two subsamples, "approvals" and "denials" (whether rejected by the Board or by the Commissioner's office), as follows:

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Approvals	148	(46.1)
Denials	173	(53.9)
TOTAL	321	(100.0)

Each subsample was analyzed separately to determine the success of the classification recommendations. Another purpose was to ascertain the outcome of those individuals who were actually placed in the community in terms of successful placements, escapes, or returns to higher security. A six month follow-up period was used in the analysis, beginning with the date of classification of each individual. The outcome of the "approvals" group will be discussed first.

TABLE III

FOLLOW-UP OF INDIVIDUALS APPROVED FOR PLACEMENT

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Approved, but not placed	17	(11.5)
Approved and placed	131	(88.5)
TOTAL	148	(100.0)

As can be seen in Table III, only 11.5% of those individuals approved by the Board for placement in a community-based facility were not placed there during this six month follow-up period. Although the reasons why these individuals were not placed as recommended by the Board was not apparent in the data used in this analysis, it can be noted that one of those individuals was eventually paroled. The next step in the analysis was to ascertain the success of the 131 individuals who were actually placed into lower security facilities.

TABLE IV

OUTCOME OF INDIVIDUALS APPROVED AND PLACED IN COMMUNITY BASED FACILITIES

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Successful Placements	93	(71.0)
Escaped, at large	5	(3.8)
Escaped, returned to higher security	12	(9.2)
Returned to higher security	14	(10.7)
Returned to higher security, re- classified to lower security	7	(5.3)
TOTAL	131	(100.0)

As can be seen from Table IV, of the 131 individuals who were approved and actually placed in community based facilities, 71.0% or 93 individuals can be considered successful placements. This category includes those individuals who continue to participate in their community based programs, those who were transferred to other community based facilities and remain there as of the end of the 6 month follow-up period, those who were paroled from their lower security placements, and those who were discharged. Seventeen individuals, or 13.0% of this population, escaped from their placements and either remain at large, or were returned to higher security facilities. Sixteen percent of this subsample was returned to higher security facilities because they were found to be unsuitable for community based facilities, either for disciplinary or for other reasons. However, of those 21 people returned to higher security, 7 individuals were once again reclassified to lower security facilities, having been returned to higher security institutions for only minor disciplinary reasons. Since the entire period of this study is only six months, this cannot really be considered a failure (as defined as a return to a higher security facility) since they were transferred to a lower security facility again within such a short period of time. In assessing the total success or failure rate of those individuals approved and moved to lower security facilities, as shown in Table V, those individuals who were returned to higher security, but then re-

classified to lower security during the 6 month follow-up period will be considered neither successes nor failures, but rather, "other".

TABLE V
SUCCESS RATE OF THOSE APPROVED AND ACTUALLY PLACED

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Successes	93	(71.0)
Failures	31	(23.7)
Other	7	(5.3)
TOTAL	131	(100.0)

The failure rate of those individuals approved by the Board for placement in a community based facility and actually placed there, therefore, is only 23.7%. It can generally be concluded that for those approved and placed, there did not appear to be a high failure rate for those reclassified to lower security by the Community Based Classification Board.

The next step of the analysis was to assess the outcome of those denied for placement in a community based facility either by the Board or by the Commissioner's office. A general breakdown of their movement during the 6 month follow-up period appears in Table VI below.

TABLE VI
FOLLOW-UP OF INDIVIDUALS DENIED PLACEMENT

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Remained in higher security	60	(34.7)
Placed eventually in community based facilities	113	(65.3)
TOTAL	173	(100.0)

It is interesting to note that although 173 individuals were denied placement in a community based facility, only 60 of these, or 34.7% of the subsample were actually never moved from their present institution. It should also be noted that of the 60 individuals who were never moved from their original institution, 52 of them had been denied by the Board, rather than by the Commissioner's office. This could indicate that the denials from the Commissioner's office were conditional upon completion of a program or clearing up an outstanding disciplinary report, with a recommendation for review and reclassification to a lower security facility within a short period of time. The remaining 113 individuals (65.3%) were placed into lower security facilities during the 6 month follow-up period after the initial classification decision. The outcome of these 113 individuals that were placed in community facilities is shown in Table VII.

TABLE VII

OUTCOME OF INDIVIDUALS DENIED PLACEMENT BUT
PLACED IN COMMUNITY BASED FACILITIES

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Successful Placements	87	(77.0)
Escaped, at large	7	(6.2)
Escaped, returned to higher security	3	(2.7)
Returned to higher security	13	(11.5)
Returned to higher security, re- classified to lower security	3	(2.7)
TOTAL	113	(100.0)

As can be seen in Table VII, of the 113 individuals who were transferred to community based facilities, even though they were originally denied placement, 87 individuals (77.0%) were considered successful placements. As previously defined, this group includes all individuals remaining in lower security facilities, all paroles and all discharges. Ten individuals escaped from their lower security placements for an escape rate of 8.8%. Finally, 16 individuals were returned to higher security facilities for disciplinary or other administrative reasons, thereby constituting a failure in their lower security placements. However, 3 of these individuals were later reclassified to lower security facilities within the 6 month time framework, once again forming a separate category, "other", since they can be included in neither successes nor failures. The total success rates for the denial group is seen in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII

SUCCESS RATE OF THOSE DENIED PLACEMENT, BUT PLACED

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Successes	87	(77.0)
Failures	23	(20.4)
Other	3	(2.7)
TOTAL	113	(100.0)

As this table shows, the failure rate of the denial group was only 20.4%. Interestingly enough, this failure rate was even lower than the failure rate for those individuals who were originally approved by the Board for community placement (23.7%).

The success rate for the entire sample can be seen in Table IX, including all individuals who were moved to lower security facilities, whether they were originally approved or denied by the Board.

TABLE IX

SUCCESS RATE FOR ENTIRE SAMPLE

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Successes	180	(73.8)
Failures	54	(22.1)
Other	10	(4.1)
TOTAL	244	(100.0)

As Table IX shows, out of 244 individuals in the entire sample who were transferred to a community based facility, during this six month follow-up period, only 54 individuals were considered failures, either by escape or by return to a higher security institution. A failure rate of 22.1% for the entire population classified by the Community Based Boards is very low, and it can only be concluded that the recommendations made by the Board during the specified period of this study were successful.

DISCUSSION

To summarize these results, from October to December 1976, 321 individuals appeared before the Community Based Classification Boards to be reclassified to lower security facilities. Of these 321 individuals, 46.1% were approved for placement in a community based facility and 53.9% of these individuals were denied, either by the Board or by the Commissioner's office. Therefore, over half of the individuals reviewed by the Board at that time were rejected as not being suitable for transfer, possibly being a function of the selection process.

A high proportion (88.5%) of the 148 individuals approved for placement were, in fact, placed into community based facilities, and those individuals had a success rate of 71.0%. Of the 173 individuals rejected for transfer to a lower security facility, 113 (65.3%) were actually transferred to a community based facility during the six month follow-up period. This may have occurred for several reasons. First, as noted earlier, a rejection by the Board did not necessarily have negative connotations. Therefore, an individual may have finished his involvement with an institutional program and then been transferred to a community based facility. A second explanation may stem from a conditional denial from the Commissioner, as mentioned earlier, and an individual may have been reviewed at a later time, but still within the time framework. A third possibility may be that the individual was denied by the Community Based Classification Board, but then approved for transfer when appearing before a different board. In any case, those individuals who were originally denied, but then transferred to a lower security facility had a success rate of 77.0%, which is even higher than the success rate for those originally approved for placement.

For the entire sample, therefore, the failure rate was only 22.1%, reflecting 54 failures out of 244 individuals reclassified to lower security facilities. It can be concluded, therefore, that: 1) the majority of individuals approved by the board for placement in a community based facility were actually moved and remained there with a relatively low failure rate (23.7%); 2) approximately 2/3 of those rejected by the Board or the Commissioner were eventually reclassified and transferred to a community based facility with an even lower failure rate of 20.4%; therefore, 3) since previous research in Massachusetts pre-release facilities show failure rates to be generally between 30% and 50%*, there is no statistical evidence that the Community Based Classification Board in effect during that period was unsuccessful in placing individuals into community based facilities.

* Although these failure rates are based on a follow-up period of one year, failures generally occur during the first 6 months after release; therefore, these rates can be compared to those in the present study.

This report presents the results of a preliminary analysis of the movement of those individuals classified by the Community Based Classification Board during the three month period in 1976. The next stage of the analysis will examine the background, criminal history and commitment information of each of the 321 individuals involved in this study to distinguish any differences or similarities between successes or failures, or to discover any trends in characteristics among those selected for reclassification. The results of the first stage of the analysis are presented here since the six month follow-up period has now passed and the results were felt to be important enough to report at this time.