

**Model Education Programs for Rikers Dischargees:
Supportive Basic Skills Program
A Program of the New York City Department of Correction (DOC)**

PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY

This overview of the New York City Department of Correction's (DOC's) Supportive Basic Skills Program is based on a program review conducted by Westat/Metis staff for the evaluation of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiatives. The data were collected between January and June 2008 through interviews with staff of CEO, staff of the sponsoring agency (DOC), staff and administrators from Horizon Academy and Austin H. MacCormick Island Academy,¹ and staff from the provider agency (including the Interim Executive Director, Director of Education, Director of Outreach, Director of Post-Release Programming, Director of Human Resources, and other program staff); a site visit to the provider agency's offices; and a review of program documents and monthly data reports through May 2008 and management reports from DOC through June 2008.

Sponsoring Agency: New York City Department of Correction (DOC)

Provider Agency: Friends of Island Academy (FoIA)

Start Date: October 2007

CEO Budget: \$75,000

Target Population: Young adult inmates (male and female) ages 16 to 24 in DOC custody

Statement of Need: Studies have shown a strong connection between lack of education, unemployment, poverty, and criminal activity. According to the DOC, about 70 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds who are incarcerated at Rikers Island are high school dropouts,² with 50 percent of these young adults being functionally illiterate.³ Expansion of post-release educational programs is geared toward increasing literacy, educational skills, and occupational skills and helping stem the cycle of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and recidivism.

Goal and Services: The main goal of the Supportive Basic Skills Program is to reduce recidivism among young people (ages 16 to 24) who have been released from DOC custody on Rikers Island by addressing the pressing educational needs present in this target population. The basic education classes to be provided by FoIA are designed to provide a solid foundation upon which to build toward attainment of a high school or GED diploma. In order to recognize the multiple challenges that these young people face in trying to successfully reintegrate into their communities, education services are embedded within a larger comprehensive case management framework that offers counseling and work and career supports.

Eligibility Criteria: Reading and writing below the 5th-grade level

Targets/Outcomes: The target and actual numbers for the categories presented in Table 1, as well as the percentage of each target obtained, are as of June 2008.

¹ Island Academy and Horizon Academy are the two high schools on Rikers Island and operate under District 79 (Alternative Schools and Programs) of the New York City Department of Education (DOE). Island Academy has three school sites and serves detained and sentenced male and female inmates ages 16 to 24 in three jails. Horizon Academy serves detained male inmates ages 18 to 24 in five jails.

² Travis, J., et al. (2001), "From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry." Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute. See also, Freeman, R. (1992), "Crime and the Employment of Disadvantaged Youths," in Peterson, G., and Vroman, W. (eds.), *Urban Labor Markets and Job Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

³ Hirsch, A., et al. (2002), "Every Door Closed: Barriers Facing Parents with Criminal Records." Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy and Community Legal Services.

Table 1. Supportive Basic Skills Program Outputs and Outcomes as of June 2008

Category	Target Numbers	Actual Numbers*	Percent of Target Met*
Recruitment/Assessment	100	64	64%
Transitional Plans	100	60	60%
Confirmed Arrivals	50	3	6%
Literacy Gains	18	0	0%

*Data provided by DOC

Selected Key Findings

Fidelity to the Program Model. The FoIA model offers pre-release services including outreach and recruitment sessions and the development of Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs) and Transitional Plans for those who indicate interest in enrolling in the program upon their discharge. Post-release services include three levels of education classes (literacy, adult basic education, and pre-GED/GED prep) and comprehensive support services (including case management and support groups, an employment program, and a youth development program). The DOC contract introduced two enhancements to the FoIA program model: a transportation program and the incorporation of the Wilson Reading Program (WRP) into the basic literacy classes. From the evidence available to the Westat/Metis team, it does not appear that the program model as it was originally conceived was implemented with fidelity. The WRP was not implemented with fidelity in terms of instructor training and ongoing support, or as part of a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction, which is how it is intended. In addition, staffing shortages and turnover at FoIA undermined the provider's ability to maintain a consistent presence at Rikers. The transportation component was not implemented as planned. Finally, based on conversations with FoIA and DOE staff from both Horizon and Island Academies, it seems that communication issues between the groups affected the recruitment process.

Characteristics of the Clients Served in Comparison to the Target Population. In the first year of the DOC contract, the provider was to have recruited a total of 100 participants, of whom approximately one-half would enroll in the program and one-quarter would attain the desired literacy gains. According to data maintained by the provider and reconciled by DOC, as of the end of June 2008, there were 60 young people who had signed MOAs and developed Transitional Plans. Of these, only three made the transition from Rikers to the off-island FoIA program (i.e., were "confirmed arrivals" and participated in a minimum of 9 program hours). None completed the program (i.e., received 75 hours of instruction), and therefore none attained the proposed literacy gains.

Service Delivery. The core components of the Supportive Basic Skills Program include pre-release services, which take place on Rikers Island, and post-release services, which take place at the provider's offices in midtown Manhattan. Pre-release services include outreach and recruitment activities – large-group presentations and one-on-one follow-up sessions with students who express interest in program services, during which initial Transitional Plans are developed. Post-release services include continued outreach to draw discharged young people to the provider's site to enroll in the program, intake and assessment (including mental health screening), education services, counseling (including substance abuse, men's and women's groups, and therapeutic treatment), and other youth development activities (e.g., Hip Hop Academy). Post-release services offered by FoIA are basically the same for all young people, including those eligible for the Supportive Basic Skills Program.

Provider Capacity and Agency Management. Data from interviews with program staff reveal that this past year has presented significant challenges to FoIA. There has been a great deal of staff turnover at all levels of the organization. Moreover, many of the staff positions are part-time, which limits the time and opportunities

available for collaboration. Finally, District 79 of the NYC Department of Education rescinded FoIA's status as an alternative education program. According to the DOE, this transpired because the program did not have enough participants to warrant the use of DOE teachers. The decision was also based on the fact that FoIA is three blocks away from a District 79 literacy site, and students could be served at the District 79 site instead of at FoIA. By all accounts, the loss of District 79 status dealt a significant blow to the provider and to the CEO program in particular. Having District 79 status rescinded has meant the loss of certified teachers, professional development resources, and instructional supplies and materials. Staff from DOC and FoIA have met monthly throughout the year on Rikers, and DOC conducted three site visits to the program. When it was apparent that FoIA was having significant difficulties meeting its enrollment targets, there were open and frank discussions to brainstorm possible approaches and solutions. When relations were strained with DOE personnel, DOC played a mediating role.

Early Outcomes. As of 9 months into the contract year, no participant attained a literacy gain of one grade level; therefore, there are no early outcomes to report. Because attendance data were not available for review by the Westat/Metis team, it is not clear if the three confirmed arrivals completed the 75 hours of instruction that should yield this literacy gain.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As DOC's Supportive Basic Skills Program is currently being implemented, it is not meeting key CEO criteria.

- 1 Although the program has had some success in recruiting participants to attend on-island activities,
- 2 Only three young people actually made the transition to the off-site program and none completed the program.
- 3 Communication issues have impeded an effective collaboration between staff from the provider agency and DOE staff on-island.
- 4 With the loss of DOE status and funding and the absence of an Education Director, the provider may not have the capacity to design and implement a research-based literacy program that meets participants' needs and keeps them engaged in the educational process. In addition, the Wilson Reading Program may not be a good fit with the educational needs of the target population.
- 5 Continued staff turnover has affected the provider's ability to meet all of the contract milestones.

The Westat/Metis team is not recommending any future evaluation studies for the Supportive Basic Skills Program.

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PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT

1. Introduction

The Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) has funded approximately 40 initiatives across some 20 sponsoring agencies aimed at reducing the number of working poor, young adults, and children living in poverty in New York City. CEO is committed to evaluating its programs and policies and is developing a specific evaluation plan for each of its initiatives. For example, several major new initiatives will implement random assignment evaluations or other rigorous designs. Some programs are slated to receive implementation and outcome evaluations, while others may be evaluated using readily available administrative data. This differentiated approach reflects the varied scale of the CEO interventions, data and evaluation opportunities, and finite program and evaluation resources. Westat and Metis Associates are evaluating many of these programs on behalf of CEO. The purposes of the evaluations are to collect and report data on the implementation, progress, and outcomes of the programs in the CEO initiative to inform policy and program decision-making within CEO and the agencies that sponsor the programs.

The first phase of the Westat/Metis evaluation is to conduct a systematic review of selected CEO programs. The program reviews involve Westat/Metis staff reviewing program documents, obtaining available implementation and outcome data, interviewing program administrators, and, where appropriate, going on-site to observe program activities and interview direct service staff and participants. The results are used to assess the program design and implementation, develop a logic model to represent the underlying theory of each program, determine the extent to which the program meets key CEO criteria, examine the measurement and information systems for the program, and provide options for next steps. This Program Review Report provides an overview and assessment of the program on several dimensions, including its goals, fidelity to the program model, target population and clients served thus far, program services, and agency management.

The Supportive Basic Skills Program is one of three Model Education initiatives sponsored by the New York City Department of Correction (DOC) through performance-based contracts that utilize payment milestones. Each program aims to improve the social and economic transitioning of young people released from Rikers Island jails back to their communities.¹ Friends of Island Academy (FoIA) was started in 1990 as a one-stop shop for young people (ages 16 to 21) who have had involvement with the juvenile justice system. Due to FoIA's experience providing education transition services to formerly incarcerated young adults, DOC selected FoIA through a competitive process to implement the Supportive Basic Skills Program.

Information and data for this Program Review Report are based on interviews conducted by Westat/Metis staff between January and June 2008 with staff of CEO, staff of the sponsoring agency (DOC), staff and administrators from Horizon Academy and Austin H. MacCormick Island

¹ Individuals incarcerated in Rikers Island serve up to 12 months. Those sentenced to over a year are transferred to a state prison facility.

Academy,² and staff from the provider agency (including the interim executive director, director of education, director of outreach, director of post-release programming, director of human resources, and other program staff); a site visit to the provider agency's offices; and a review of program documents and monthly and quarterly data reports through May 2008 and management reports from DOC through June 2008.

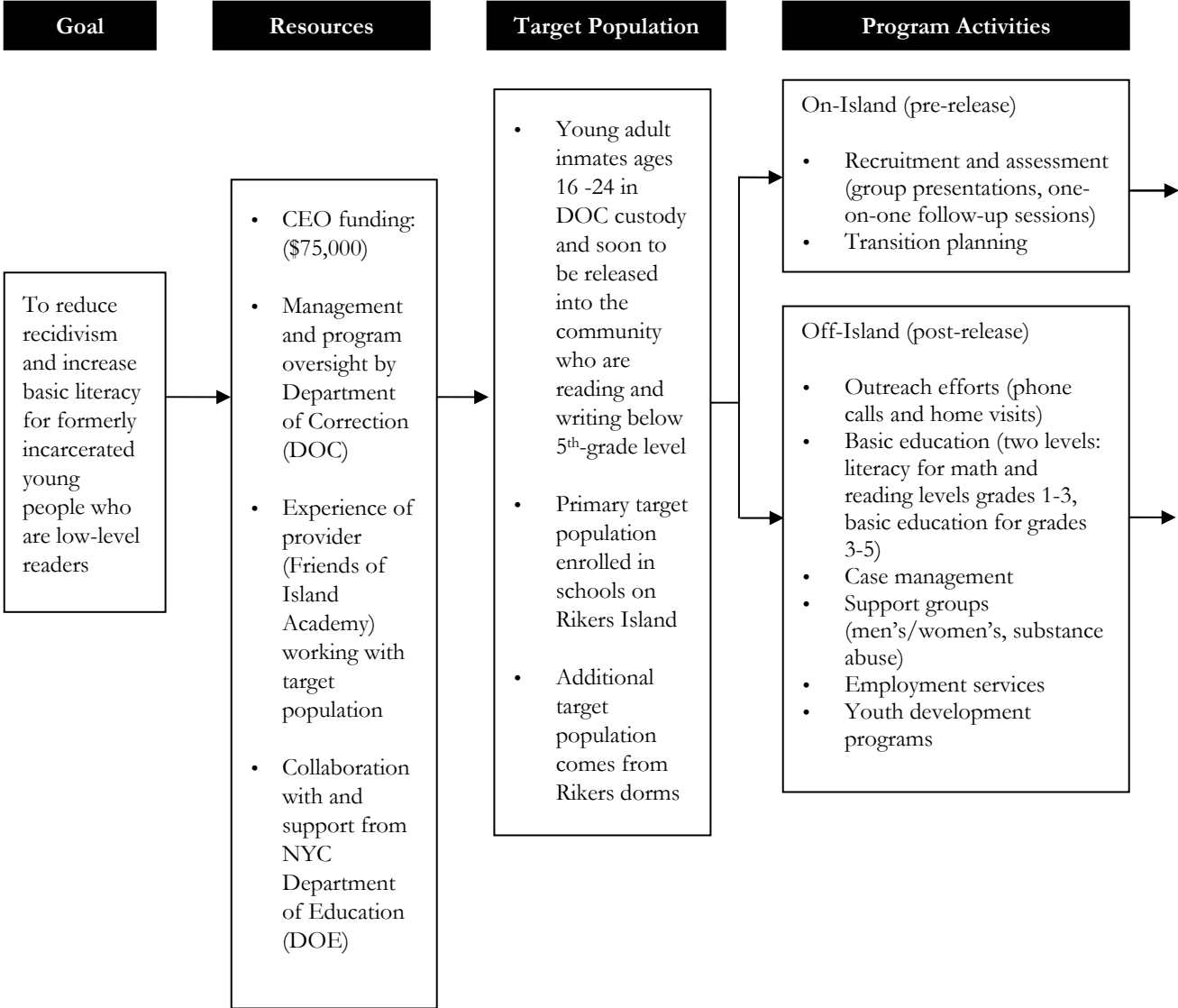
A key analytic tool in the program review is development of a logic model that serves as a visual representation of the underlying logic or theory of a program. The program logic model details the program's context, assumptions, and resources and their relationships to one another. By examining the program's internal logic and external context, the evaluation team and reader are able to determine if the program design is consistent with overall goals and capable of achieving its intended outcomes. Toward this end, this report focuses on early outcomes and the challenges faced in achieving them.

2. Overview and Assessment of the Program

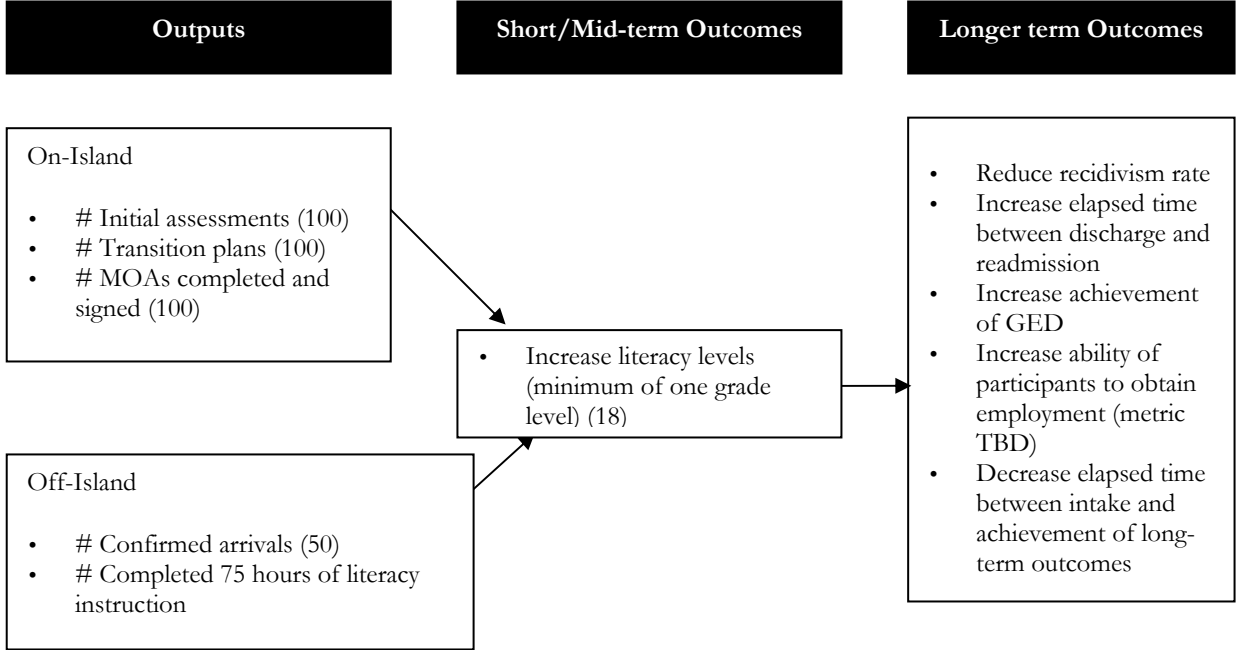
Program Goals. The main goal of the Supportive Basic Skills Program is to reduce recidivism among young people (ages 16 to 24) who have been released from DOC custody on Rikers Island by addressing the pressing educational needs of this target population. In addition, given the multiple challenges that these young people face in trying to successfully reintegrate into their communities, education services are to be embedded within a larger comprehensive case management framework that offers counseling and work and career supports. The Supportive Basic Skills Program model is displayed in a logic model—or theory of action—format on the following two pages. The logic model includes the program's context, assumptions, and resources. Each activity is linked to the number of individuals targeted to participate in the different activities (outputs), as well as short- and long-term participant outcomes.

² Island Academy and Horizon Academy are the two high schools on Rikers Island and operate under District 79 (Alternative Schools and Programs) of the New York City Department of Education (DOE). District 79 was created to help students with an array of challenges succeed by providing diverse and innovative educational opportunities combining rigorous academic instruction with meaningful youth development. Island Academy has three school sites and serves detained and sentenced male and female inmates ages 16 to 24 in three jails. Horizon Academy serves detained male inmates ages 18 to 24 in five jails.

**New York City Department of Correction (DOC)
Model Education Programs for Rikers Dischargees: Supportive Basic Skills Program
Logic Model**



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Context: (1) Approximately 70% of 16- to 24-year-olds who are incarcerated at Rikers are high school dropouts.¹ (2) About 50% of the aforementioned young adults are “functionally illiterate.”² (3) Two-thirds of adolescents released from Riker’s Island are re-incarcerated.³ (4) Best practices indicate that temporary employment programs should be coupled with education and a continuum of care (e.g., counseling) to be effective.⁴ (5) Rikers Island has approximately 14,000 inmates in custody on an average day.⁵

¹ Travis, J., et al. (2001), "From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry." Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute. See also, Freeman, R. (1992), "Crime and the Employment of Disadvantaged Youths," in Peterson, G., and Vroman, W. (eds.), *Urban Labor Markets and Job Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

² Hirsch, A., et al. (2002), "Every Door Closed: Barriers Facing Parents with Criminal Records." Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy and Community Legal Services.

³ Brown, D. et al. (2002), *Barriers and Promising Approaches to Workforce and Youth Development for Young Offenders*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁴ New York City Department of Correction CEO Contract (2007). *Getting Out-Staying Out FY 2008 Scope of Work*. New York: Author.

⁵ Muske-Dukes, C. (July 18, 2007), "A Prison Tale Suffering From Overpopulation," a review of "Channeling Mark Twain" by Chris Bohjalian, *The Washington Post*.

Fidelity to the Program Model. Through a competitive bidding process, DOC selected Friends of Island Academy (FoIA) as the provider for the Supportive Basic Skills Program. DOC negotiated a performance-based contract with FoIA with specific performance targets and payment milestones. FoIA proposed to meet the objectives of the solicitation notice—and the specified performance milestones—through its existing program model, which includes pre-release programming on Rikers Island (on-island) and post-release services offered at FoIA’s midtown Manhattan offices (off-island). Pre-release services include outreach and recruitment sessions and the development of Memoranda of Agreements (MOAs) and Transitional Plans for those who indicate interest in enrolling in the program upon their discharge. Post-release services include three levels of education classes (literacy, adult basic education, and pre-GED/GED prep) and comprehensive support services (including case management and support groups, an employment program, and youth development programming). The DOC contract introduced two enhancements to the FoIA program model: the incorporation of the Wilson Reading Program (WRP) into the basic literacy classes and a transportation program. From the evidence available to the Westat/Metis team, it does not appear that the program model as it was originally conceived was implemented with fidelity, as detailed below.

Data maintained by both FoIA and DOC attest to the fact that the provider struggled to meet the performance milestones associated with on-island recruitment. Meeting the first two performance milestones meant a young person had attended a recruitment session on-island, had a follow-up individual session with a FoIA outreach worker, expressed interest in joining the program—as evidenced by signing an MOA—and developed an initial Transitional Plan. This outreach and recruitment strategy depends on the provider’s long-standing experience working with DOC staff on Rikers as well as effective collaborative relationships with the administrators and educational and counseling staff of Horizon and Island Academies. Staffing shortages and turnover at FoIA undermined the provider’s ability to maintain a consistent presence at Rikers. In addition, based on conversations with FoIA and Department of Education (DOE) staff from both Horizon and Island Academies, it seems that some communication issues between the groups affected the recruitment process.

In implementing its contract with DOC, FoIA restructured its basic education classes to incorporate the Wilson Reading Program (WRP) in the past year. The WRP was originally developed by Barbara Wilson through her work with adults with language disorders and evolved into a research-based reading and writing program designed to enable students to develop fluent decoding and encoding skills to the level of mastery. The WRP directly teaches the structure of words in the English language with an organized and sequential system comprising 12 steps, using a series of workbooks as well as software for computer-assisted instruction. The WRP is designed primarily for individuals who have difficulty with written language in the areas of decoding³ and spelling and is meant to be used in conjunction with other tools and resources to provide comprehensive literacy instruction for non-readers. The WRP is being used at both Horizon and Island Academies for those students with decoding issues and is being delivered by Wilson-certified teachers,⁴ which provided an additional rationale for its use in the Supportive Basic Skills Program.

³ Decoding is the understanding of the mechanics of text (concepts about print), the knowledge that spoken words consist of a sequence of individual sounds or phonemes (phonemic awareness), a familiarity with the letters in the language (letter knowledge), the knowledge that the letters in the written words represent corresponding sounds (alphabetic principle), and the ability to bring these elements together to decipher regular words.

⁴ Professional development in the Wilson program includes a continuum of training from a 10-hour introductory workshop to Level II Certification. Levels I and II Certification include coursework, a practicum, and teacher/student observations by a Wilson trainer.

However, based on interviews during the Westat/Metis site visit with FoIA program staff (including the education director and the WRP teacher) it does not appear that the WRP was implemented with fidelity. Unlike teachers at the Academies who have been certified in the Wilson method, the part-time teacher who was delivering the basic literacy instruction at FoIA participated in a 15-hour introductory workshop at the beginning of the year and had no additional follow-up training or technical assistance to support implementation of the model during the rest of the year (minimal technical assistance is available through the WRP website). Furthermore, the Wilson program is not meant as a stand-alone program but rather to be used as one instructional resource in a balanced literacy approach. It was not clear from an interview with the Wilson teacher that the instructional program incorporated any other resources or tools. Finally, due to low enrollments, the two classes that were offered (one for young people with reading levels between 1st and 3rd grade and a second for those with reading levels between 3rd and 5th grade) were combined into one class.

Based on the performance milestone data submitted by the provider to DOC, it is evident that only three of the young people who signed MOAs on Rikers were “confirmed arrivals” at FoIA (i.e., participated in 9 hours of program services) and of these, none completed the program (i.e., received 75 hours of instruction). According to the interim executive director, the vast majority of young people served by FoIA are mandated by the courts to participate. Expecting young people discharged from Rikers to take the initiative to seek out and enroll in the program of their own volition is at best an uphill battle. In one striking anecdote related by a member of the staff, one young man made it all the way to Penn Station from one of the outer boroughs but couldn’t travel the last few blocks to FoIA’s offices on West 38th Street because he could not read the street signs and was too embarrassed to ask for directions.

The DOC contract included a provision for transporting young people discharged from Rikers directly to FoIA’s base of operation in midtown Manhattan to facilitate the transition from pre-release to post-release services. This component of the contract was not implemented. In lieu of providing transportation, FoIA does issue Metrocards to those young people who enroll in their program. However, there is general agreement among FoIA staff that even if transportation were available, it would not make sense to expect that FoIA would be a young person’s destination of choice after incarceration nor that providing Metrocards would serve to grease the wheels of engagement in the program.

Target Population and Clients Served. The target population for the Supportive Basic Skills Program is young inmates (male and female) ages 16 to 24 in DOC custody soon to be released into the community, who are reading and writing below the 5th-grade level. In the first year of the DOC contract, the provider was to have recruited a total of 100 participants, approximately half of whom would enroll in the program and one-quarter would attain the desired literacy gains.

According to data maintained by FoIA through March 2008,⁵ of the 34 young people who signed MOAs on-island, all were males and the majority were Black (74%), followed by Hispanics (24%). Given Rikers’ largely male population, outreach staff indicated that recruiting female inmates on-island was particularly challenging, largely because they are such a smaller percentage of the overall population at Rikers (only 8%). Only 9 percent of participants were under 18; the majority (88%) were in the 18- to 20-year-old bracket. The largest number of participants were from Brooklyn

⁵ These demographic data were provided by FoIA and have not been reconciled by DOC.

(35%) and Bronx (35%), followed by Queens (15%) and Manhattan (12%). The smallest number of participants were from Staten Island (3%).

Outreach and Recruitment. Outreach and recruitment for the Supportive Basic Skills contract mirrors the provider's general approach to recruitment on Rikers, with some important differences. In both cases, the provider leverages its long-standing relationship with DOC on-island personnel to facilitate access to young inmates. However, the interim executive director noted that despite building on procedures and services that were already in place, there were incremental costs associated with trying to achieve the recruitment milestones of the DOC contract that strained the provider's operating budget.

When recruiting for the Supportive Basic Skills Program, outreach staff receive from DOE staff rosters of young inmates who meet the basic eligibility and selection criteria (i.e., ages 16 to 24, reading below 5th-grade level, sentenced and due for release within 90 days). The program decided to target recruitment efforts toward the sentenced population because those awaiting disposition of their cases could be sent upstate, which would preclude participation in the program; this narrowed the universe of Horizon and Island Academy schools to about three to five school sites (as stated in an earlier footnote, both Horizon and Island Academy have multiple school sites) from which to recruit. FoIA staff hold group presentations with the young people in which they talk about the basic skills program as well as other topics (e.g., ways to avoid recidivism, what is good about being out of jail, and things they hate about being in jail). According to the outreach staff, a typical day consists of conducting two recruitment sessions comprising about 15 young people. Informal methods of recruitment exist as well. Recruitment staff hand brochures and business cards to young inmates. In addition, female recruitment staff speak with house mothers in the dorms (house mothers are inmates who enforce the rules of the dorm, explain procedures to new inmates, and serve as representatives to DOC).

Those who express interest in FoIA during the group presentations are then taken into a smaller group setting to learn more about the program, provide contact information, and complete intake forms. During the follow-up individual sessions, young people are asked to sign MOAs and begin the process of developing Transitional Plans. Once initial intakes are completed and MOAs signed (on average about three to five each day), FoIA outreach staff visit these young people anywhere from one to five times before they are released, in order to nurture a connection with them and continue the process of completing the Transitional Plans.

A limited number of young people attend the orientation sessions on-island; of those, most do take the extra step of meeting with a FoIA outreach worker and signing an MOA and an initial Transitional Plan. Although this would seem to suggest that the young people are interested and receptive to what FoIA has to offer, one FoIA outreach worker suggested that attending these kinds of sessions may simply be viewed as a welcome break in the routine of jail life.

By their own admission, staff from FoIA acknowledge that they have not been very successful in recruiting students to the program. The interim executive director was very frank about the fact that they have not "found the key" to the engagement process. However, FoIA recently hired a full-time director of outreach and plans are under way to dramatically increase the agency's presence on-island next year.

Program Services. As shown in the logic model, the core components of the Supportive Basic Skills Program include pre-release services, which take place on Rikers Island, and post-release services, which take place at the provider's offices in Manhattan. Pre-release services include outreach and recruitment activities, which are described in the preceding section. Post-release services go into operation when a young person is discharged from Rikers Island, with the goal of drawing the young people who signed MOAs and developed initial Transitional Plans on-island into the FoIA off-island program. Again, post-release services offered by FoIA are basically the same for all young people, including those eligible for the Basic Supportive Skills Program, and include the following components:

Continued outreach. Beginning 3 days after a young person is released, outreach staff make repeated phone calls and conduct home visits. If a month after release has gone by and the person has not made it to the program, staff will continue outreach efforts to that person, although this was not a requirement of the DOC contract. Recently, a young person joined the program 4 months after release.

Intake and assessment. Initial intakes at FoIA are completed on Tuesdays and Thursdays. During the intake process, each young person is assigned a case manager for the purpose of developing a goals plan. The young person is also assessed using a mental health screening tool. After meeting with the case manager, the young person meets with the Education Department and completes testing (the Test of Adult Basic Education or TABE) to identify his or her educational needs. Testing typically takes place on Fridays and participants start school the following Monday. When young people who have been recruited on Rikers arrive at the agency, staff members are highly sensitive to the need to make the intake process both welcoming and expeditious in an attempt to reward the young person's motivation and courage.

Education services. Since 1999, FoIA has been providing education programming for post-release young people and expanded its capacity in 2002 to offer literacy classes, basic education, and pre-GED/GED classes for 20 hours per week on a year-round basis. The Supportive Basic Skills contract was designed to enhance the provider's capacity to serve students with low literacy levels by incorporating the WRP into the basic literacy classes, which would target two separate groups of students: those reading between 1st and 3rd grade and those whose math and reading grade levels were above 3rd grade but below 5th grade.

According to the education director, both of these classes were offered this past year, although at a certain point, due to low enrollments,⁶ the two levels were combined (the Wilson instructional model is designed to be used with very small groups to maximize student/teacher interaction). Classes took place every morning from 9:00-11:20 a.m. and then from 12:00-1:00 p.m. (the students had a break from 11:20-12:00). For those young people who participated in the literacy classes, feedback about the WRP was not positive. In the words of two program staff, the young people attending the basic literacy classes found the approach "insulting" and "childish." On one occasion a confirmed arrival from Rikers walked out of class session angry and embarrassed. The provider recognizes that it needs to make improvements to the literacy program so that it better addresses the needs and learning styles of program participants, and is planning to revamp the curriculum over the summer.

⁶ The Westat/Metis team has made a request for attendance data for the basic literacy classes for the 2007-08 school year, but at the time of this writing the data have not yet been provided.

Counseling services. FoIA offers a comprehensive case management approach that includes an array of supportive services to all of its participants in addition to the education classes. Case managers at FoIA typically maintain a caseload of 20 to 25 young people. Those young people identified as having mental health needs can receive counseling and/or treatment either on-site or through referrals to one of the agencies with which FoIA has linkages (e.g., Mount Sinai Hospital’s Adolescent Health Center). In addition, group counseling is provided through various support groups, including the Men’s/Women’s Group and Substance Abuse Group. Employment readiness and job placement activities are held on an as-needed basis and typically take the form of weekly workshops. For example, a 6-week workshop on employment skills and financial literacy was offered in the summer of 2008.

Other services. From 1 to 3 p.m. the students may participate in after-school youth development activities, which include the support groups mentioned above as well as other enrichment programs. For example, FoIA has partnerships with a number of arts and cultural agencies, such as the International Center for Photography and the Museum of Modern Art, which support educational and cultural programming for participants (e.g., Hip Hop Academy and photography classes). Tutoring has previously been offered on Wednesday but is now being offered on an ad hoc basis when volunteers and mentors are available and the services are needed. To date, the three confirmed arrivals have not utilized the after-school youth development activities or tutoring available to them.

Outputs and Outcomes. Table 1 presents the Supportive Basic Skills Program target and actual numbers for key performance milestones, as well as the percentage of each milestone obtained. These data are as reported through June 2008.

Table 1. Supportive Basic Skills Program Outputs and Outcomes as of June 2008

Category	Target Numbers	Actual Numbers	Percent of Target Met
Recruitment/Assessment	100	64	64%
Transitional Plans	100	60	60%
Confirmed Arrivals	50	3	6%
Literacy Gains	18	0	0%

Provider Capacity. Data from interviews with program staff reveal that this past year presented significant challenges to FoIA. There has been a great deal of staff turnover at all levels of the organization, including the position of executive director, director of post-release programming, and most recently, the director of education. Moreover, many of the staff positions are part-time, which limits the time and opportunities available for collaboration. For example, staff meetings, which are held regularly on Fridays, typically involve staff at the director level but do not necessarily include line staff. Consultation about particular participants occurs on an ad hoc basis, but often needs to be of a general nature so as to protect confidentiality agreements.

Furthermore, at just about the same time the DOC contract was about to get under way, FoIA learned that District 79 of the NYC DOE was rescinding its status as an alternative education

program. According to the DOE, this transpired because the program did not have enough participants to warrant the use of DOE teachers. The decision was also based on the fact that FoIA is three blocks away from a District 79 literacy site, and students could be served at the District 79 site instead of at FoIA. By all accounts, the loss of District 79 status dealt a significant blow to the provider and to the CEO program in particular. Having District 79 status rescinded has meant the loss of certified teachers, professional development resources, and instructional supplies and materials.

This rescinding of District 79 status was associated with a loss of resources that have not been replaced, even though FoIA receives support from an array of public and private funding sources. In addition to the contract with DOC, the provider has three large government contracts (from Department of Youth and Community Development, Department of Juvenile Justice, and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene). Major funders from the private sector include the Robin Hood Foundation and van Ameringen Foundation.

Based on the preliminary findings about how performance data are collected and reported, the provider needs technical assistance to develop data entry protocols for ensuring data completeness and accuracy and maximize the use of the Efforts to Outcomes Software (ETO Software)⁷ system to collect and report on the full program activities, including the CEO performance and outcome data. Technical assistance is also needed to help develop and organize reports that the provider could produce.

Agency Management. From the inception of the contract's implementation DOC had concerns about the provider's capacity to meet the expectations of the performance-based contract, and thus took an active management role with regard to this CEO project. This role has been very well received by the leadership of the provider agency. Staff from DOC have met monthly with the executive director and subsequently the interim executive director throughout the year and conducted three site visits to the program. Prior to the monthly meetings, which were held on-island, FoIA would produce and submit its monthly report for review and discussion during the meetings. When it was apparent that FoIA was having significant difficulties meeting its enrollment targets, there were open and frank discussions to brainstorm possible approaches and solutions. When relations were strained with DOE personnel, DOC played a mediating role.

Conclusions. As DOC's Supportive Basic Skills Program is currently being implemented, it is not meeting key CEO criteria:

- 1) Although the program has some success in recruiting participants to attend on-island activities, only three young people actually made the transition to the off-site program, and none completed it.
- 2) Communication issues have impeded an effective collaboration between staff from the provider agency and DOE staff on-island.
- 3) With the loss of DOE status and funding and the absence of an education director, the provider may not have the capacity to design and implement a research-based literacy program that meets participants' needs and keeps them engaged in the educational process.

⁷ The ETO Software was developed by Social Solutions and is used for data tracking and reporting purposes. The interim executive director indicated that the Robin Hood Foundation recommended and purchased the software for FoIA.

In addition, the Wilson Reading Program may not be a good fit with the educational needs of the target population.

- 4) Continued staff turnover has affected the provider's ability to meet all of the milestones of the contract.

3. Programmatic Recommendations

From discussions with staff at the provider agency, there appears to be a strong commitment to offer a comprehensive and holistic array of services to address the pressing needs of the young people coming through the doors of FoIA. Programming with organizations such as the International Center for Photography, the Museum of Modern Art, and others provide opportunities for young people to express their creativity, form relationships with positive role models, and think about possible career directions. However, given the poor track record of the provider in meeting the requirements of the DOC contract, as evidenced by few participating students and no expected outcomes achieved, ongoing staffing issues, and the loss of District 79 status, the provider may simply not have the capacity to delivery quality literacy services at this time.

If the Supportive Basic Skills program continues, the Westat/Metis team has the following recommendations for program improvement:

- 1) Schedule planning sessions over the next few months with educational and counseling staff from both Horizon and Island Academies in order to solidify a productive working relationship with these on-island schools for the purpose of outreach and recruitment and program planning and design.
- 2) Revamp the curriculum and instructional approaches used in the basic literacy program. As part of this strategy, consult with staff from the WRP in order to ascertain the "goodness of fit" of the program and the profile of the target population to be served by the Supportive Basic Skills Program. If the provider is going to continue to use the WRP for basic literacy instruction, ensure that the staff member delivering the instruction is Wilson-certified and that a relationship with the WRP is formed to foster ongoing staff development and technical assistance.
- 3) The provider needs technical assistance to develop data entry protocols for ensuring data completeness and accuracy, and to maximize the use of the ETO Software system to collect and report on program activities, including the CEO performance and outcome data. Technical assistance is also needed to help develop and organize reports that the provider could easily produce.