

**EVIDENCE BASED RESEARCH**  
**FOR**  
**SUBSTANCE ABUSE OFFENDERS**  
**USING**  
**THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS INSTITUTE'S**  
**ADULT COGNITIVE LIFESKILLS SUBSTANCE ABUSES HOME STUDY**  
**(ACLSA/HS) WORKBOOK**  
**IN COLLABORATION WITH**  
**BOX ELDER COUNTY JUSTICE COURT**  
**BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH**  
**HONORABLE KEVIN L. CHRISTENSEN, PRESIDING**  
  
**COMPILED BY TREVOR J. LLOYD, M.S.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The following is an evidence based research study between the American Community Corrections Institute, ACCI, and the Box Elder County Justice Court, here in referred to as the BEJC.

This study is based on the fifteen point criteria set forth as a standard for evidence-based programs in the US. The focus of the study was to determine the effect of ACCI's Adult Cognitive Lifeskills Substance Abuse Home Study Workbook, ACLSA/HS, on substance abuse offenders referred by BEJC.

The study had one single focus and that was to determine the results of inserting ACCI's Home Study Cognitive Lifeskills Substance Workbook, ACLSA/HS, into the normal operating procedures of the court. The outcome was to observe the effects on a relatively isolated community court by intervening with a cognitive restructuring substance abuse workbook. The results of the three and a half year study was a 57% drop in target substance abusers going through the court.

The participants consisted of five entities; one, the criminal offenders; two, the Box Elder County Justice Court; three, Lorain Riser the monitor and registrar who sat in court, signed up offenders, and issued workbooks as they left court; four, the ACCI's staff and computer tracking system; five, Trevor Lloyd, an Organizational Psychologist responsible for development and adherence to the 15 point criteria for evidence-based programs.

The Box Elder County Justice Court with the Honorable Kevin L. Christensen, presiding, is an ideal county because of its isolation and the fact that Judge Christensen is both the Municipal Court Judge for Brigham City and the Justice Court Judge for the county. All of the targeted population who were arrested in the county went through his court.

People addicted to chemicals are wholly addicted, that is, physically, mentally, and emotionally. To rehabilitate substance abusers required creating a tool that intervenes at a deep enough core level that can bring a person out of self deception, denial and see their life in a new way. This procedure is called cognitive restructuring which, when done correctly, can help people overcome faulty thinking and self-defeating thoughts and behaviors. Self-awareness or cognitive restructuring is the first and most important step in recovery. If this first step is not effective, then no further progress can be made in recovery.

The intervention tool used was ACCI's Adult Cognitive Lifeskills Substance Abuse Home Study Workbook, ACLSA/HS, catalog # W 114. This workbook is a 60-page, 20-hour, cognitive restructuring home study workbook. The workbook requires a coach of the offender's choosing, who is over 18, to go through the workbook with the offender.

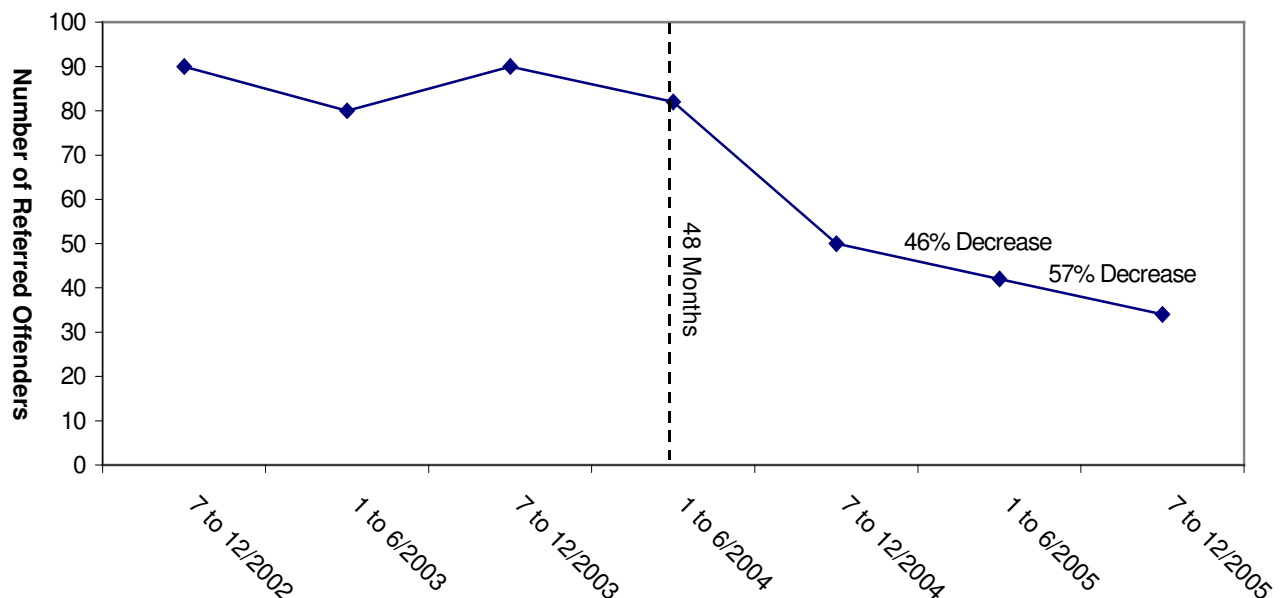
This study focused on all offenders going through the court with offenses such as minor in possession or consumption. The only exception was Spanish speaking offenders because no equivalent Spanish workbook was then available. These offenders consisted of DUI, marijuana, Meth, alcohol and all other illegal substances. They consisted of first and second time offenders with serious offenders being sent to long-term drug and/or alcohol therapy. From the very first referral in June, 2002 to the present, Judge Christensen has used the same criteria when placing offenders in ACCI's home study programs with an estimated variance of  $\pm 3\%$ .

The BEJC ordered offenders to complete ACCI's Adult Cognitive Lifeskills Substance Abuse Home Study Workbook, ACLSA/HS, within 30 days. The offender would then be signed up in court by the registrar using customized court referral forms, and given a home study kit which included instructions, the workbook and a self addressed return envelope. The referral forms are faxed to the home office for processing.

The offender would then complete his/her workbook by the set due date and mail it back to ACCI with their fee of \$85. Failure to comply would result in up to two warning notices and a warning phone calls to the offender before a "failure to comply" notice was faxed to the court. Compliance rate was 92.2% compared to ACCI's normal rate of 70 to 80% for group lifeskills classes.

## STATISTICS

The study covered a three and one half-year period from June 2002 to December 2005; it consisted of 487 substance abusers. Seventy-eight percent were male, 22% female, with an average age of 24.6. The filings in the court went from 86 offenders for a six-month period to 37 offenders for a six-month period at the end of the study. The results were a dramatic 57% decrease in filings of the targeted population. The courts in surrounding counties, who were not using ACCI's Adult Cognitive Lifeskills Substance Abuse Home Study Workbook, ACLSA/HS, all had increases in this targeted population.



The above graph is in six-month increments. The numbers shown represent the total referrals for that six-month period. During the three and a half-year study period, 487 offenders were referred with 440 offenders completing, resulting in a 92.2% completion rate with 10 still in the process. The number of offenders reported as non-compliant was 37, and warrants were issued by the court for their arrest.

The sharp drop after two years is consistent with other counties who have used ACCI's materials. The theory is that it takes two years to go through a local drug population. Because they don't repeat as they had in the past, arrests and referrals drop. ACCI has experienced the same results time and again with numerous agencies throughout the United States, Canada and other foreign countries.

This latest study, as outlined in the following fifteen points rating criteria for evidenced based programs, is yet another proof or validation that ACCI's programs are highly effective in reducing recidivism rates.

## **FIFTEEN POINT RATING CRITERIA FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS**

1. Theory: the degree at which programs reflect clear principles about substance abuse behavior and how it can be changed.

Substance abuse behavior is a symptom of a deeper systemic disease that if not confronted will render the subject incapable of long term sobriety. This systemic disease is the person himself, his personal way of being. Each person has two selves, their outer or physical self and their inner or mental self. If the inner self is in denial and resides in the box of self-deception, no progress towards sobriety can be made. Therefore, the first and most important step to recovery is cognition or self-awareness.

ACCI, from its extensive experience in conducting hundreds of substance abuse classes, has clearly found cognitive restructuring to be the single most effective tool to help offenders get out of their box. Once they are outside the box of self-deception, faulty thinking can be addressed. If they can't get past the first step, no future intervention will be affective.

The key, then, in changing substance abuse behavior is to subject the individual to effective cognitive restructuring material. In its purest form, cognitive restructuring can go the center of the inner self and restructure self-defeating thoughts and behaviors. It can help a self deceived, resistant person become a more responsive person willing to take the next step to recovery.

2. Intervention Fidelity: how the program ensures consistent delivery.

During the three and a half years of the study, the referral process and workbooks remained the same. Examination of completed workbooks demonstrated a consistent level of understanding and compliance regardless of socioeconomic status, race,

gender, ethnicity or nature of offenses. To ensure consistent delivery, Judge Kevin Christensen used the same criteria for sentencing to the substance abuse home study workbook. During this study, ACCI's substance abuse workbook remained the same and office staff maintained consistency in processing, grading and computer tracking of offenders.

### 3. Process Evaluation: whether the program implementation was measured.

The process of valuation is described as a series of actions that bring about a described measurable outcome. ACCI and BEJC implemented prescribed procedures both in referring offenders and processing completed home study workbooks. These procedures remained in force with an estimated  $\pm 2\%$  error rate.

The court, without bias to gender, race, or socio-economic status, referred both first and second substance abusers as they appeared on the court dockets, as arrested by local law enforcement officers. No attempt was made to screen or evaluate those referred to ACCI's home study substance abuse workbook.

The court did not alter its judicial procedures or fines and penalties, but simply added the requirement to complete ACCI's workbook.

The workbook became the only tool or instrument used to achieve or measure the outcome. All other factors remained the same. The measurement was to what extent or degree the workbook could prevent the offender from repeating. The study compared the number of offenders normally going through the court in a six-month period from the beginning to the end of the three and a half years. The result was a 57% drop from 86 offenders to 37.

During the three and a half-year study, the county or the court's jurisdiction grew 2% in population and one additional police officer was hired. Adjoining courts not using the workbook all had increases in substance abuse arrests and filings.

The measurement was calculated through a computer data base that tracked the assigned court code number, UT 1049, belongs to Box Elder County Justice Court. The estimated error in assigning the wrong code number was  $\pm 1\%$ .

### 4. Sampling Strategy and Implementation: how well the program selected its participants and how well they received it.

There was no selection process for participants and therefore no bias in the sample population. It was simply those who were arrested and appeared in court for substance abuse violations as per consistent criteria set down by the judge. His criteria consisted of first and second misdemeanor offenders regardless of age, gender or race.

During the three and a half-year research study, the completed workbooks were examined to determine how well the participants understood and received the material.

Through key questions in the workbook, test results and comments from the exit evaluations, ACCI sorted the participants into three groups of those who completed their workbook: Group One consisted of an average of 70% who had a strong cognitive experience; Group Two consisted of an average of 20% who had a good cognitive experience; and Group Three consisted of an average of 10% who indicated little or no change in their cognition or willingness to change.

5. Attrition: whether the program retained participants during evaluation.

Complete computer and hand written documentation on each participant has been kept. As soon as ACCI received a fax or phone call, all pertinent data was entered into the customized computer software program called TRACKS. Participants were given their own identification number. During the study, no participant's file was lost or destroyed. During the period of the study, 487 offenders were referred from BEJC with 440 completing, 10 in transit and 37 reported as non-compliant. Retention was 100%.

6. Outcome Measures: the relevance and quality of evaluation measures.

All evaluation measures were the same. The outcome measurements were subject to a  $\pm 1\%$  mechanical error factor and a  $\pm 3\%$  human error factor. The study clearly demonstrated that by only adding ACCI's Adult Cognitive Lifeskills Substance Abuse Home Study Workbook, ACLSA/HS, that BEJC's filings for target population fell from 86 for a six month period to 37 for a six month period, or a 57% decrease in filings.

The relevance of social applicability of the study clearly demonstrates that ACCI's cognitive restructuring approach to substance abuse is highly effective with the targeted population of substance abusers. The conclusion is relevant in that it offers a simple and yet highly effective intervention to reduce substance abusers nationwide.

7. Missing Data: how developer addressed incomplete measurements.

There were no incomplete measurements for this study except for a small estimated mechanical and human error, as previously discussed. All measurements were fully completed. There was no missing data or forms. All workbooks were accounted for.

8. Data Collection: the manner in which data were gathered.

Data was gathered from court referrals that were entered, tracked and evaluated using ACCI's computer tracking system (TRACS). There was no human guessing, It was strictly the number of referrals as tracked over a three and a half year period. Each workbook was hand graded for completion, accuracy and understanding. In addition, the ACLSA/HS workbook has an exit test with a required passing grade of 70%. Failed participants were sent a new workbook and required to go through the same procedure again. There was no "failures" in this study group.

9. Analysis: the appropriateness and technical adequacy of data analyses.

The analyses of data came from advanced Apple computers. The computer was asked to compile a report on UT 1041 (insert: Screen display) showing the number of completions, non-completions and the reduction of referrals in six month increments for the period of the study. Periodic checks made after the completion of the study shows a continuous average of 36 targeted cases from the high of 89 for the first six months. Hand written data was also used to compare with computer data with a slight variance of less than  $\pm 1\%$ .

10. Other Plausible Threats to Validity: the degree to which the evaluation considers other explanations for program effects.

There were no other known plausible threats to the validity and outcome of the study.

11. Replications: number of times the program has been used in the field.

ACCI's Adult Cognitive Lifeskills Substance Abuse Home Study Workbook, ACLSA/HS, was placed in service in January of 2002. By the end of the study in December of 2005, approximately 3,600 substance abuse offenders had been referred from 38 misdemeanor or felony courts in four states. The total number of referrals for all ACCI's home study workbooks during this period was 7,183. The home study program continues to be duplicated in many new courts with the same success.

12. Dissemination Capability: whether program materials are ready for implementation by others in the field.

ACCI's has hundreds of its workbooks in inventory that can be readily shipped to others in the field. From referral to delivery takes an average of three days via the US Postal Service. ACCI receives inquiries and orders via the Internet, e-mail, fax and phone. For group programs, ACCI has self-directed training kits and certification for Lifeskills facilitators.

13. Cultural Age Appropriateness: the degree to which the program addresses different ethnic, racial and age groups.

ACCI's workbooks are in English and Spanish with specialized workbooks for youth (ages 12 to 17) and adults (18 and over). All of ACCI's workbooks are written at the 6th to 7th grade level and employ numerous learning techniques to reach the intended population. The home study workbooks have had extensive exposure to Native Americans, Hispanics and many other cultures. The results have always been the same. The curriculum is universal and is effective regardless of race, creed, ethnic background or socio-economic conditions.

Each new workbook goes through a committee to eliminate gender, age, ethnic and racial bias. ACCI's workbooks have no hidden agenda or focus on lifestyle, political or religious issues. The ACLSA/HS workbook remained focused on the job at hand, which was to act as a cognitive restructuring intervention tool, to stop the cycle of substance abuse.

14. Integrity: overall level of confidence of the scientific rigor of the evaluation.

The integrity of the study lies in its simplicity and consistency. It is simply a study of numbers taken from computer data entries. The human element does not cloud the scientific rigor of the evaluation. The fact remains, consistent with many other studies, that inserting ACCI's substance abuse home study workbook (ACLSA/HS) into the normal court procedures resulted in a 57% reduction of substance abuse filings in the court while surrounding courts had an increase.

15. Utility: overall pattern of program findings to form prevention theory and practice.

The results of this evidence based research study clearly illustrate that ACCI's cognitive restructuring workbooks can prevent substance abusers from repeating. From theory to practice, ACCI has achieved the same results with all of its programs. Studies of other lifeskills programs show little or no effect on recidivism rates after a year or less. Boring, ineffective material is quickly forgotten. The results of this study offer hope to the judicial agencies in the US and other countries; they have access to proven, scientifically designed intervention workbooks to dramatically reduce substance abuse in their community. Although the instrument used in this study was a home study version of the ACCI's workbooks, similar results have been obtained with the ACCI's group workbooks.