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Examination of the Kendall County Youth Education Class

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HIGHLIGHTS

- The program is serving the intended target population of youth charged with alcohol or cannabis-related offenses;
- Youth ordered to the program are ordered to pay a significant amount in the form of fines, court costs and program fees, averaging \$464 per participant;
- Positive improvements in youth awareness of alcohol and drug issues were evidenced through pre- and post-tests given to program participants;
- Program participants experienced relatively low post-program rates of rearrest, with 26 percent being rearrested for something other than an ordinance violations, and most new arrests for minor offenses.

A Description of the Youth Served and Post-Program Recidivism Patterns

Introduction

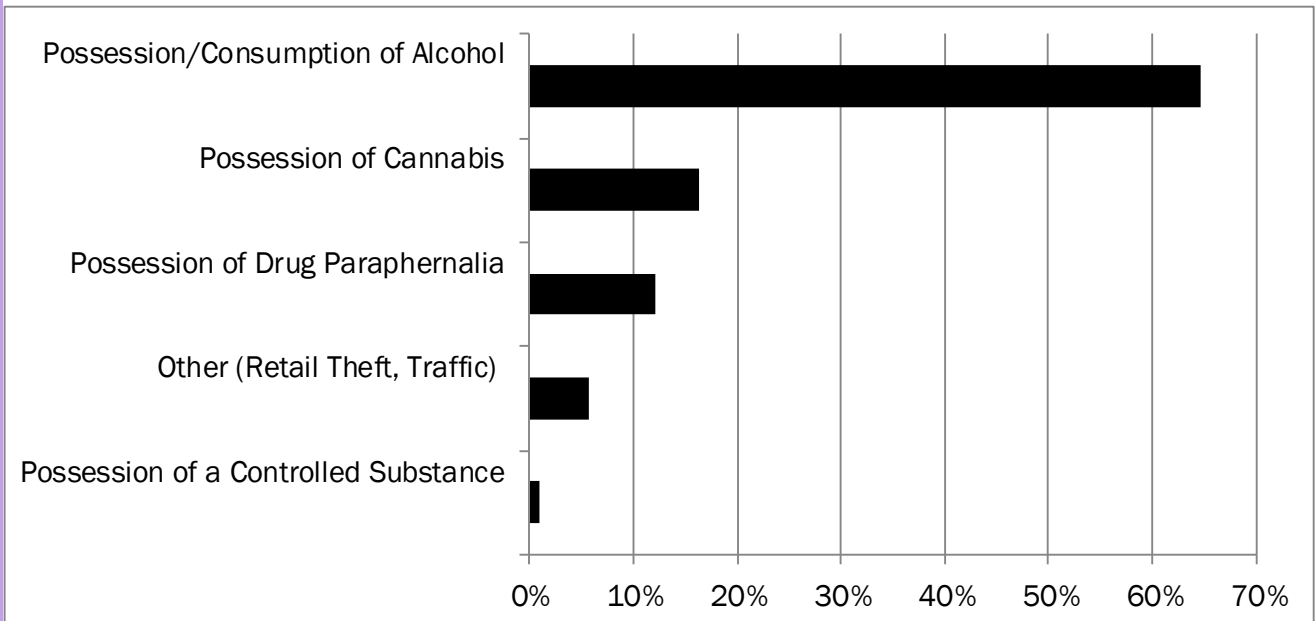
In 2002, the Kendall County Probation and Court Services Department implemented a program designed to divert youth charged with illegal possession of alcohol offenses from the formal justice system. The Youth Education Class (YEC), carried out jointly by the Kendall County Probation and Court Services Department and the Kendall County Health Department, is designed to provide youth charged with first-time alcohol and drug-related offenses with education and information, over the course of a 5-week period, regarding the health and legal risks associated with alcohol and drug use. Youth are ordered to the program by the Kendall County Court, and participation in the program is either part of a formal sentence to supervision or ordered in lieu of a formal case disposition. Participants are required to attend 5 sessions of the program, and are also required to complete a written test at the conclusion of the course to gauge their understanding and retention of the material presented in the class. In addition to attending the classes, youth ordered to the program are also required to comply with financial conditions ordered by the court, which include a participation fee for the program. The curriculum is delivered to cohorts of youth—roughly 15 youth at a time—at different points during the year.

In order to systematically examine the youth served by the program, and the post-program patterns of rearrest/recidivism for the youth who go through the program, in 2012 the Kendall County Probation and Courts Services Department requested that Loyola University Chicago's Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology assist them in performing research to examine the characteristics of the youth served by the program and the extent and nature of post-program arrests for youth who matriculate through the program. Following approval of the project from the Chief Circuit Judge, and Loyola University's Institutional Review Board, Dr. David Olson and a group of students from Loyola University collected data on-site at the Kendall County Probation and Court Services Department during 2012, and completed data analyses in 2013. This bulletin summarizes the results of that research.

The Sample and Data Collection

In order to examine the characteristics of youth served through the Youth Education Class (YEC) program, the research team collected information for the 387 youth admitted to the program during late 2009 through mid-2012, across 25 different cohort classes. The data that were collected from the intake forms completed by all program participants included demographic characteristics (age, race, gender), current school/education status, the offense that



Figure 1: Offense Resulting in Admission to YEC Program

resulted in their referral to the program, and whether or not the youth had previously received counseling through the Kendall County Health Department (KCHD). Roughly 1 out of every 12 (8 percent) youth admitted to the YEC program indicated that they had previously received

counseling through the KCHD.

Although the program is designed to address alcohol/drug use among youth, when the crime for which the youth were placed in the program was examined it was noted that a portion of the

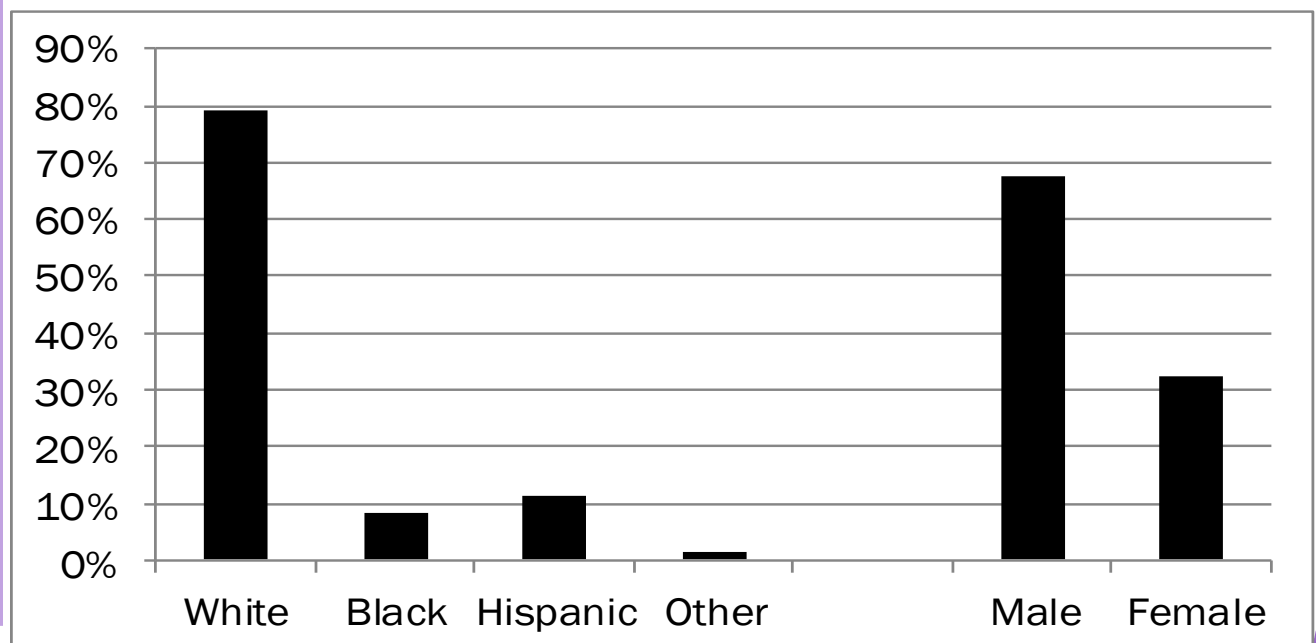
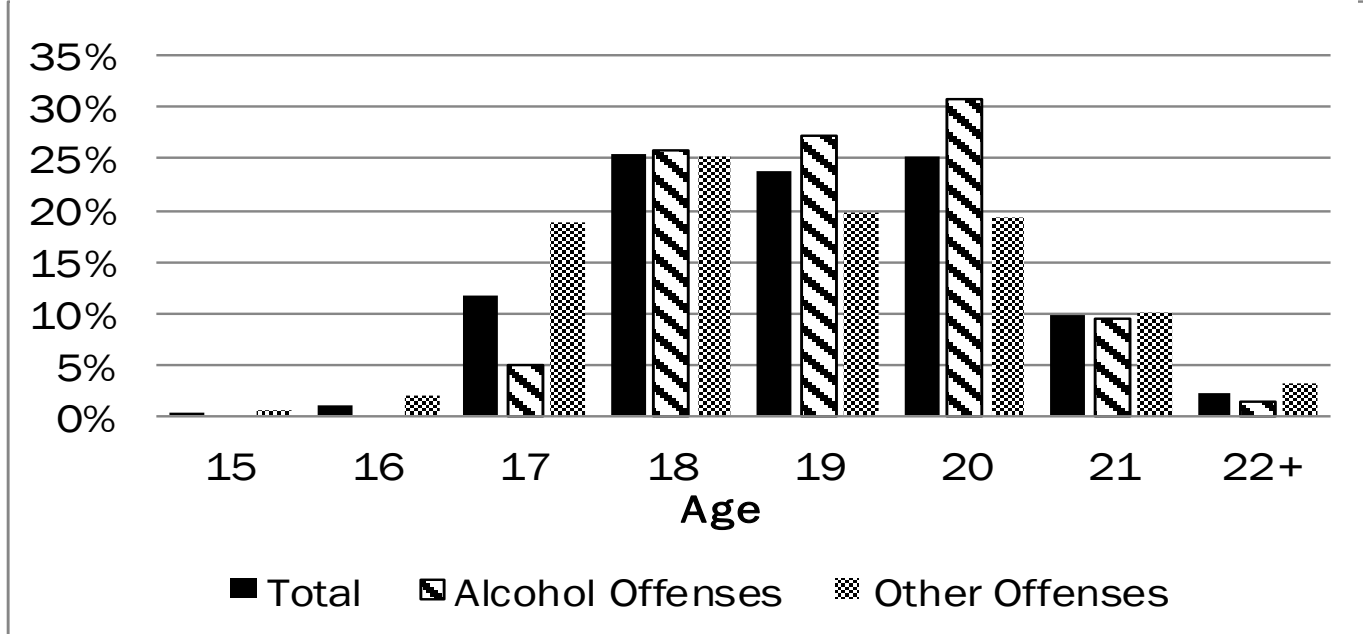
Figure 2: Race & Gender Distribution of Youth Admitted to YEC Program

Figure 3: Age Distribution of Youth Admitted to YEC Program, by Charge Type

cases involved crimes other than alcohol possession by a minor (Figure 1). The majority of individuals admitted to the YEC program were referred as a result of a current charge involving illegal possession or consumption of alcohol by a minor. The next most frequent type of offense, which accounted for roughly 1 out of every 7 of those admitted to the program, was possession of cannabis, followed by possession of drug paraphernalia.

Characteristics of Youth Served

The majority of program participants were white males (Figure 2), although nearly one-third of all cases admitted to the YEC program were female. Almost 80 percent of youth admitted to the YEC program were white, with Hispanics accounting for the second largest group of program participants, at just over 11 percent, and roughly 8 percent accounted for by black youth.

The average age of youth admitted to the YEC program was 19 years of age, although the age of those admitted to the program were pretty evenly distributed from participants between 18 and 20 (Figure 3). The age was determined based on the youth's date of birth and their admission into the program, thus some youth arrested for unlawful consumption of alcohol by a

minor could have been 20 at the time they were arrested and 21 at the time of admission into the program. Specifically, 25 percent of youth admitted to the program were 18, roughly 25 percent were 19 and 25 percent were 20 years of age. Thus, 18 to 20 year olds accounted for three-quarters (75 percent) of the youth admitted to the program. Fewer than 15 percent (1 out of 7) were under the age of 18 and roughly 10 percent were 21 or older at admission.

There was not much of a difference in the age distribution or the average age of program participants when those admitted to the program for alcohol-related offenses were compared to those admitted for non-alcohol related offenses (Figure 3). Roughly 30 percent of those admitted to the program for alcohol offenses were 20 years of age, compared to 20 percent of those admitted for non-alcohol offenses being 20 years of age.

Although not all youth admitted to the program reported family income on the intake form, for the most part only a small portion (20 percent) of program participants reported annual family

The typical participant in the program was a white male between the ages of 18 and 20 charged with possession/consumption of alcohol by a minor.

Table 1
Communities Where Youth Admitted to YEC
Program Resided

	Number	Percent
Community		
Oswego	85	22.2%
Aurora	68	17.8%
Yorkville	50	13.1%
Montgomery	40	10.4%
Plano	34	8.9%
Plainfield	21	5.5%
Sandwich	9	2.3%
Morris	7	1.8%
Naperville	7	1.8%
Newark	7	1.8%
Shorewood	5	1.3%
Bristol	4	1.0%
Chicago	4	1.0%
Somonauk	4	1.0%
Bolingbrook	3	0.8%
Channahon	4	0.8%
Joliet	3	0.8%
Minooka	3	0.8%
DeKalb	2	0.5%
Hampshire	2	0.5%
Romeoville	2	0.5%
Communities with 1 admission each to the program: Batavia, Crystal Lake, Elburn, Elgin, Frankfort, Hinckley, Hometown, Libertyville, Lombard, Manteno, Millbrook, Millington, Mokena, Ottawa, Shabbona, Sheridan, Stickney, Sugar Grove, York		

incomes over \$50,000, and roughly 40 percent reported family incomes of less than \$5,000.

In terms of educational status at program entry, the majority of participants admitted to the program had completed high-school (with 35 percent having completed high school and an additional 25 percent currently in college). The remaining 40 percent of participants were either currently in high-school (25 percent), enrolled in a GED program (5 percent) or had dropped out of school and were not currently enrolled (8 percent).

Youth admitted to the program came from 43 different communities throughout the 23rd Judicial Circuit (Table 1), with youth from a handful of communities accounting for relatively large numbers of the admissions to the program. For example, youth from Oswego accounted for 22 percent (roughly 1 out of every 5) of the youth admitted to the program during the study period, followed by Aurora (17.8 percent) and Yorkville (13.1 percent). Youth from these three communities accounted for more than one-half (53.1 percent) of all of youth admitted to the program during the 2009-2012 study period. There were three additional communities with double-digit admissions to the program, including Montgomery, Plano, and Plainfield. Combined, these six communities accounted for 77 percent of all the youth referred to the program during the study period. Another 15 communities had multiple youth admitted to the program—between 2 and 9—and 19 communities had 1 youth admitted to the program during the time period examined.

Financial Conditions Ordered

In addition to information collected from the program intake form, court records maintained by the Kendall County Probation and Court Services Department were also reviewed and information was collected regarding fines, court costs and program fees that were ordered.

Among the youth that comprised the 25 cohorts examined for this study, the total amount of fines ordered of program participants combined exceeded \$122,000, or an average of \$316 in

finest per program participant. Overall, 75 percent of the youth ordered to the program were also ordered to pay fines. In addition to fines, the 387 youth that made up these 25 cohorts collectively were ordered to pay more than \$43,000 in court costs. Court costs were ordered for 78 percent of the youth referred to the program, and in almost every case, the amount of the costs ordered to be paid was \$145. Finally, youth who participate in the YEC program can also be ordered to pay a fee designed to offset the costs associated with providing the program. This fee was generally either \$40 or \$50, and 76 percent of youth in the study were ordered to pay this fee. Collectively, the 25 cohorts combined were ordered to pay more than \$14,000 in YEC fees, or an average of \$37 per participant. When the amount of fines, court costs and YEC fees ordered were combined, the collective total for the 387 youth examined for this study was roughly \$180,000, or an average of \$464 per participant.

Changes in Pre-Post Test of Youth Awareness

In order to gauge the impact of the program on increased awareness and knowledge of the health and legal risks associated with alcohol and drug use, scores from the pre- and post-

tests administered to program participants were examined and compared. The pre- and post-test is designed to gauge knowledge and awareness of the health and legal consequences associated with drug and alcohol use.¹

Based on analyses of these data, improvements between the pre- and post-test scores were seen across all participants combined, as well as within the specific sub-groups of those admitted to the program with alcohol charges and other charges, males and females, and whites and non-whites (Figure 4). For example, the average pre-test score for all program participants was 14.9, compared to an average post-test score of 18.4: the higher the score, the more questions that were answered correctly out of a possible perfect score of 25. All of these differences in pre- and post-test scores, overall and among the specific sub-groups, were statistically significant.

Post-Program Recidivism/Rearrest

In order to determine what happened to youth once they were admitted to the program, identifying information for each youth (name, date of birth, race and gender) were submitted to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority to generate criminal history record

Figure 4: Comparison of Pre-Post Test Scores, Overall and Specific Groups

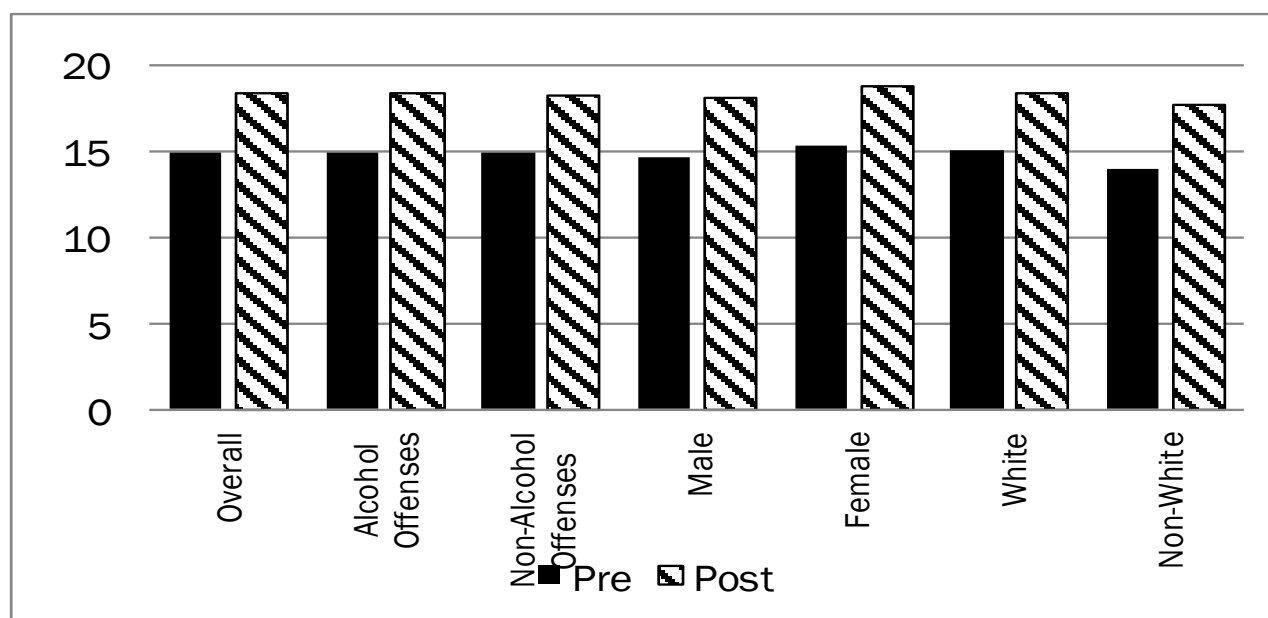
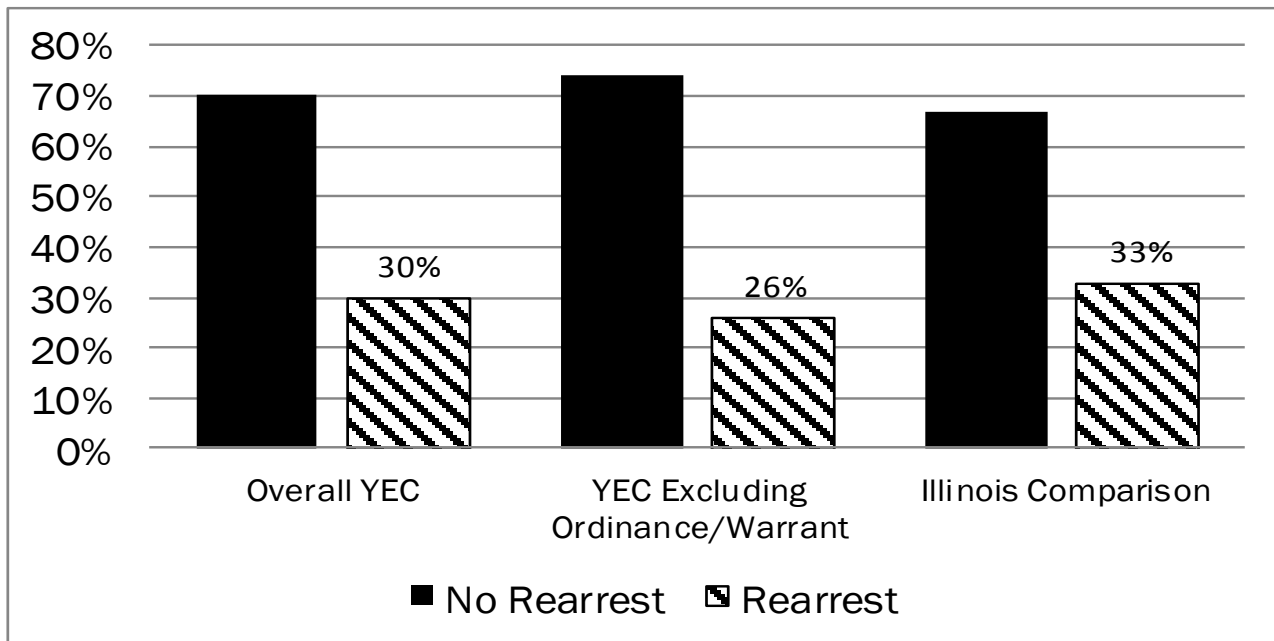


Figure 5:
Comparison of Recidivism at 18 months Post-Program, YEC Overall, YEC Excluding Rearrests for Ordinance/Warrant Offenses, and a Comparison Group of Similar Illinois Probationers



information from the Illinois State Police. Out of the 387 individuals for which criminal history records were sought, records were obtained for 325 of these individuals. Those individuals for whom criminal history records were not obtained were not matched either because of incorrect information regarding these identifiers or because they have not been arrested and fingerprinted for a crime that would establish and create a criminal history record with the Illinois State Police. It is possible that some of the youth who were juveniles when arrested for the offense which resulted in their admission into the YEC program did not involve fingerprinting and the creation of an official criminal history record with the Illinois State Police.

Of those individuals tracked for post-program admission recidivism, the average length of time between their admission into the program and when criminal history record information was checked was roughly 2.6 years (945 days). The majority of youth tracked (84 percent) and included in the analyses had at least 1 ½ years (18 months) between their admission into the program and the criminal history check to see if they had been rearrested.

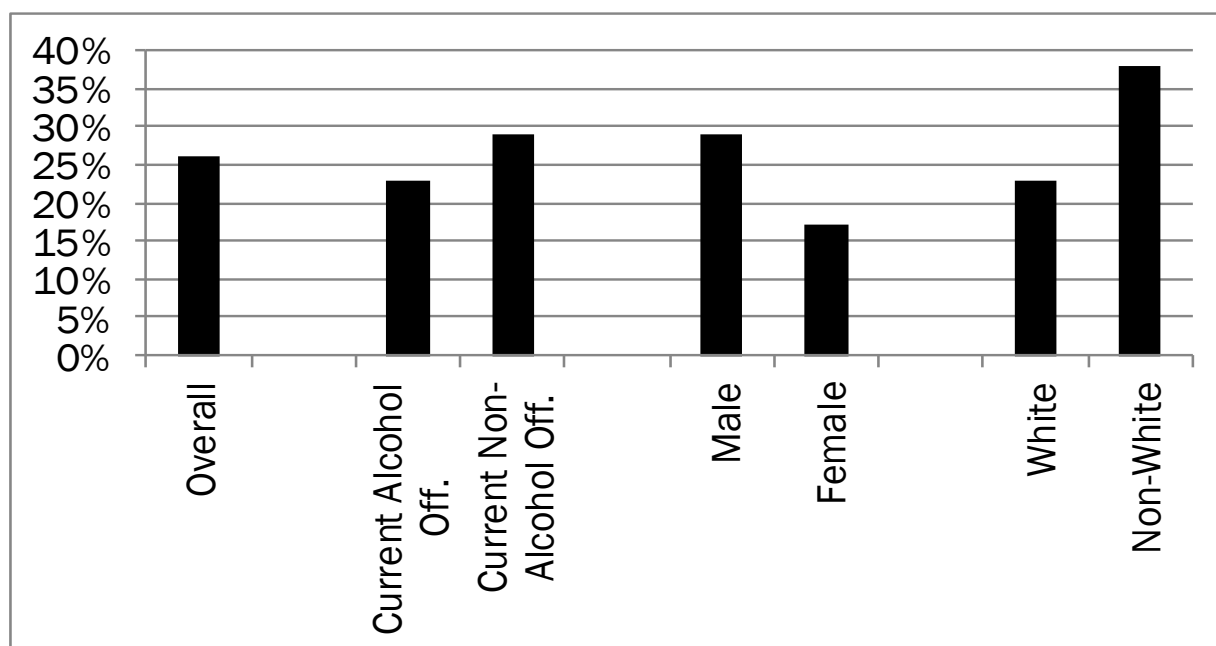
Of the individuals admitted to the program during the study period, for whom a pre and/or post criminal history record was obtained and who attended the sessions (N=306 of the original 387 cases), 31 percent had 1 or more arrest following their admission into the program (Figure 5). Of the relatively small proportion of youth rearrested after their admission into the YEC program, the majority of the new arrests were for relatively minor offenses (i.e., misdemeanor or driving-related offenses), such as a minor in possession of alcohol, possession of cannabis or driving on a suspended license.

Overall, the post-program recidivism of youth who participated in the Kendall County Youth Education Class program was relatively low, and most new arrests were for minor offenses

When the post-program recidivism analyses excluded new arrests posted to the criminal history record for minor bond, ordinance, warrant or illegal lane usage offense, the 18-month recidivism rate fell to 26 percent (Figure 5).

To provide some comparison, recidivism data from a larger Illinois study of those discharged

Figure 6:
**Comparison of Recidivism at 18 months Post-Program, Excluding Rearrests for Ordinance/
 Warrant Offenses, by YEC Participant Characteristics**



from adult & juvenile probation in 2000 who had been charged with cannabis possession, alcohol possession/consumption and drug paraphernalia possession, and who were between 16 and 20, were examined.² Among this comparison group, 33 percent were rearrested for a new offense within the 18 months following their discharge from supervision, a slightly higher recidivism rate than evidenced among the YEC program participants.

Differences in recidivism patterns were also seen among some specific sub-groups of participants in the YEC program. For example, those who were admitted to the program for alcohol-related offenses (primarily minor in possession) had slightly lower recidivism rates (23 percent) than those admitted for other offenses (29 percent). Similarly, females were less likely to be rearrested (17 percent) than were males (29 percent) admitted to the program, and whites were less likely to be rearrested (23 percent) than participants of other races (38 percent). These patterns/relationships with recidivism were confirmed when multivariate analyses were performed to examine the relationship between whether or not the participant was rearrested for

a non-ordinance/warrant offense (the dependent variable) and age at admission, gender, race, program offense type (alcohol or other), pre-program test score, post-program test score, and prior arrest charges. After statistically controlling for all of these variables, 4 characteristics remained as statistically associated with post-program recidivism:

- * Gender: Males were more likely to be rearrested than females;
- * Current offense: Those admitted for non-alcohol offenses were more likely to be rearrested;
- * Race: Non-whites had an increased likelihood of being rearrested relative to whites; and,
- * Prior arrest charges: The greater the number of prior arrest charges, the higher the likelihood of being rearrested.

There were no statistically significant differences between those who were rearrested and not rearrested in terms of age at program admission, nor were there any statistically significant differences between



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those who were rearrested and not rearrested in terms of pre- and post-program scores.

Conclusions & Limitations

Based on the research presented in this bulletin, it can be concluded that the Kendall County Youth Education Class program is serving the intended target population, with two-thirds of the participants being minors charged with illegal alcohol possession offenses, and most of the remaining participants charged with cannabis or drug paraphernalia possession offenses. Youth ordered to the program are also having substantive fines and fees imposed, which offset the costs associated with the diversion program and the processing of youth through the court. The program also appears to be benefitting youth from a large number of communities throughout Kendall County, with youth from 43 different communities enrolling in the program during the study period that covered admissions from the fall of 2009 to mid-2012.

In addition to serving the intended target population from a large number of communities, based on pre- post-test data collected from program participants as part of their involvement in the program, statistically significant improvements in the knowledge and awareness of the health and legal risks associated with alcohol and drug use were evident among

program participants.

Finally, the recidivism rate at 18 months post-program admission is relatively low, with those who were rearrested being involved in arrests for relatively minor offenses, and is slightly lower than recidivism rates of youth of similar ages and charged with similar offenses discharged from formal supervision in Illinois.

Endnotes

¹ Of those who showed up for classes, there was no statistically significant difference between those who completed the post-test and those that did not in the mean pre-test scores. Only 15 did not complete the post-test.

² Roughly 66 percent of the adults were on formal probation and 50 percent of the juveniles were on probation.