

Offenders ordered to the same treatment stay longer and then commit fewer crimes if sent by **criminal justice programmes** which have credible sanctions and ensure offenders understand this and know they are being monitored.

The latest report on the Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison (DTAP) programme in New York compared problem drug users (mainly daily heroin and/or cocaine users) sent to the same four residential therapeutic communities from three types of criminal justice sources. ¹ The first was DTAP itself, which allowed dealers with previous convictions to opt for treatment instead of probable conviction and prison; the second, another structured diversion programme (TASC) for offenders who have pleaded guilty. The third was normal criminal justice sources rather than a structured programme.

LINKS Nugget 8.11

Both structured programmes took care to ensure offenders were made repeatedly aware that they were being monitored and that failure to comply with treatment would attract legal sanctions usually amounting to several years in prison. After taking caseload differences into account, offenders supervised by these programmes were under a third as likely to be rearrested or reconvicted in the following three to four years, and whilst free were arrested fewer times. Previous reports had established that DTAP and (non-significantly) TASC offenders stayed longer in treatment and that retention was strongly related to offenders' perceptions that they were under legal pressure. Both structured programmes were more successful than usual criminal justice sources in instilling the particular perceptions related to retention: that the offender had been made aware of the programme's rules by several criminal justice agencies; had been made to understand the consequences of breaking rules or not completing treatment; that they would swiftly and surely be rearrested for absconding; and that the consequences would be severe. Though further analysis would be needed to confirm this, the presumption was that by fostering these perceptions, DTAP and TASC had persuaded offenders to stay longer in treatment and that this had reduced later recidivism.

¹ Young D. *et al.* "Criminal recidivism in three models of mandatory drug treatment." *J. Substance Abuse Treatment*. 2004, 27(4), p. 313–323 **DS**