

The Restorative Justice Community Courts (RJCC) are the first courts of their kind in Cook County to adopt peace circles as the resolution process for criminal cases for emerging adults. The RJCCs partner with community service providers to provide wrap-around services to participants (and also, where needed, to victims). Upon successful completion of all RJCC requirements, the case against RJCC participants will be dismissed. Currently there are RJCCs in the North Lawndale, Englewood, and Avondale communities.

The Supporting Employment and Education Development (SEED) program, operating out of the Leighton Criminal Courthouse, is a county-wide deferred prosecution program. The program was designed to target individuals charged with either manufacturing and delivery of a controlled substance or possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. Program participants receive employment services, educational opportunities, cognitive behavioral interventions, and other evidenced-based support services delivered by Heartland Human Care Services.

Key findings for each program are below.

Restorative Justice Community Courts

- A total of 218 individuals were admitted to RJCC programming between 2020 and 2022.
- The majority (84%) of the 218 individuals were admitted to RJCC on a weapons possession charge.
- As of March 31, 2023, 94 (43.1%) of the RJCC participants had had their charges dropped or dismissed, six (2.8%) had been found guilty, and 118 cases (54.1%) were still pending.
- Among those who have been in the community for at least one year after release, 13.1% of RJCC participants were charged with a new offense versus 65.2% of a matched control group. One defendant in RJCC was charged with a violent offense versus seven defendants in the matched control group, including one charged with murder.
- Among the 94 RJCC participants with charges dismissed, 10.6% (10 of 94) had new charges filed after graduation and before March 31, 2023, including five charged with felony weapons possession, two with misdemeanor battery, two with drug possession, and one with resisting an officer.

SEED Program

- 181 participants were admitted to the SEED program between January 2021 and February 2023.
- A majority of SEED participants were male (88.4%), Black (69.6%), and were charged with felony manufacturing/delivering cannabis offense (56.4%).
- There have been 60 (33.1%) successful graduates from SEED with charges dismissed, and 39 (21.6%) unsuccessful terminations, while 82 individuals (45.3%) were pending admission or actively engaged in programming on February 28, 2023.
- Overall, 39 of the 181 SEED participants (21.5%) had a new charge by February 2023.¹

¹ Recidivism rates calculated for the SEED court are not directly comparable to the RJCC rates reported here, which were calculated over a standard one-year observation period. However, we can conclude that the recidivism rate among SEED participants is higher than RJCC participants. This aligns with the

general pattern of higher recidivism among drug defendants than among weapons possession defendants.

I. Restorative Justice Community Courts

This analysis presents case outcomes and one-year recidivism rates among all Restorative Justice Community Court (RJCC) participants admitted to programming between 2020 and 2022 versus a matched control group. The matched control group included cases drawn from ZIP codes in the Chicago community areas of Austin, Chatham, and Humboldt Park, which are similar demographically to North Lawndale, Englewood, and Avondale, respectively, but do not yet have RJCCs.

Characteristics of RJCC Participants

Two hundred eighteen unduplicated RJCC participants released from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022 were included in the analysis. The sample included 90 North Lawndale participants, 41 Avondale participants, and 87 Englewood participants.

Demographic and case characteristics of RJCC participants are shown in **Table 1**. The majority of Lawndale and Englewood participants were Black, whereas the majority of Avondale participants were Hispanic/Latino. More than 90% were males. Most defendants were between 18-23 years old at the time of case filing.² The majority of defendants were charged with Class 4 felonies as the top charge, and more than 80% of Englewood and Lawndale RJCC participants were charged with weapons possession. In Avondale, 71% of the participants were charged with weapons possession and 19% with drug possession.

² Six defendants had birthdates in the Clerk's system indicating that they were older than 26 (range 27-31).

Table 1. Demographic and Charge Characteristics: RJCC Participants January 2020-December 2022

Demographics and Charge Characteristics		North Lawndale n=90		Avondale n= 41		Englewood n=87		Total RJCCs n=218	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Race/ Ethnicity	Black	79	88%	12	29%	84	97%	175	80%
	Hispanic	11	12%	27	66%	2	2%	40	18%
	White	0	--	2	5%	1	1%	3	1%
Gender	Male	83	92%	37	90%	83	95%	203	93%
	Female	7	8%	4	10%	4	5%	15	7%
Age at case filing	18	15	17%	4	10%	13	15%	32	15%
	19	18	20%	6	15%	10	11%	34	16%
	20	10	11%	5	12%	7	8%	22	10%
	21	13	14%	8	20%	10	11%	31	14%
	22	14	16%	1	2%	12	14%	27	12%
	23	11	12%	7	17%	9	10%	27	12%
	24	3	3%	1	2%	6	7%	10	5%
	25	5	6%	4	10%	7	8%	16	7%
	26	0	--	2	5%	8	9%	10	5%
	Over 26	1	1%	3	7%	5	6%	9	4%
Top Charge Class	Class X	1	1%	0	--	0	--	1	<1%
	Class 1	2	2%	3	7%	1	1%	6	3%
	Class 2	4	4%	2	5%	3	3%	9	4%
	Class 3	1	1%	2	5%	2	2%	5	2%
	Class 4	81	90%	34	83%	76	87%	191	88%
	Misdemeanor	1	1%	0	--	5	6%	6	3%
Top Charge Category	Battery	0	--	1	2%	1	1%	2	1%
	Armed Violence	1	1%	0	0%	0	--	1	--
	Agg UUW - Possession	75	83%	29	71%	73	84%	177	81%
	UUW - Possession	4	4%	0	--	2	2%	6	3%
	Other Weapon Offenses	0	--	0	--	1	1%	1	<1%
	Burglary	1	1%	3	7%	0	--	4	2%
	Motor Vehicle Theft	2	2%	0	--	2	2%	4	2%
	Retail Theft	1	1%	0	--	0	--	1	<1%
	Crim. Damage/Trespass	0	--	0	--	2	2%	2	1%
	Drug Distribution	2	2%	3	7%	3	3%	8	4%
	Drug Possession	4	4%	5	12%	2	2%	11	5%
	Motor Vehicle Offenses	0	--	0	--	1	1%	1	<1%

Case Processing – RJCC Participants

OCJ’s Research and Evaluation Unit used the SPSS function “Case Control Matching” to randomly select 211 emerging adults with cases filed in the Circuit Court of Cook County between January 2020 and December 2022 who matched the Restorative Justice Court participants on demographic and case characteristics.³ The matched control group would have been eligible for RJCC placement based on age, no prior violent conviction per the Public Safety Assessment, and no violent or person top charge on their current case. One matched control group case was randomly selected and matched on race, age (within 3 years), gender, top charge category (Drug, Person, Property, or Other charge), release date (2020 vs 2021 vs 2022), and top charge class (Class 4 vs. higher felony class) for each RJCC participant. The sample was drawn from ZIP codes in the RJCC communities as well as the community areas of Austin, Chatham, and Humboldt Park. These communities are similar demographically to North Lawndale, Englewood, and Avondale, respectively, but do not have RJCCs. **See Appendix Table 1** for demographics and case characteristics for the matched control group. The distribution of race and gender is identical in the matched control group, and the distribution of category of the top charges is similar. At 22.4 years, the average age of the matched control group is older than average age of the RJCC group (21.4 years).

Table 2 presents case status for the RJCC vs. matched control group defendants as of March 31, 2023. As can be seen in the table, 41.7% of the defendants in the matched control group were found guilty, whereas only six RJCC participants (2.8%) have been found guilty of the charges in the case for which they were referred to the RJCC. However, more than half of RJCC cases were still pending on March 31, 2023. In addition, among disposed cases, cases in RJCCs took 73% longer to resolve than cases in the matched control group (mean 429 days vs. 247 days). It should be noted that RJCC cases remain pending while the participant completes the Repair of Harm Agreement.

Table 2. Case Status on March 31, 2023:
RJCC Participants vs. Matched Control Group

Case Status as of 3/31/2023	RJCC Participants		Control group	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Dismissed/Dropped	94	43.1%	51	24.2%
Not Guilty	0	--	7	3.3%
Guilty	6	2.8%	88	41.7%
Deceased	0	0.0%	1	0.5%
Pending on 3/31/2023	118	54.1%	64	30.3%
Total	218	100.0%	211	100.0%
Average time to disposition, disposed cases	429 days (n =100)		247 days (n = 148)	

New Criminal Activity – RJCC Participants

For this analysis the OCJ Research and Evaluation Unit used the most recent new criminal activity data generated for the Model Bond Court Dashboard, which runs through the first calendar quarter of March 2023, and matched it to the RJCC and matched control groups in order to measure new charges filed. Only the first new arrest/case filing was included in this analysis.

³ Seven control cases were determined to be RJCC participants (a non-RJCC case for these participants was randomly selected by the program for the matching group), and were omitted from analysis.

Figure 1 shows the one-year recidivism rates among all Restorative Justice Community Court (RJCC) participants admitted to programming between 2020 and 2022 and a matched control group of individuals who have been in the community for at least one year after release (137 in the RJCC group and 135 individuals in the control group). As shown, the proportion of individuals in the matched control group charged with a new offense is more than three times that of the RJCC participants (65.2% vs 13.1%).

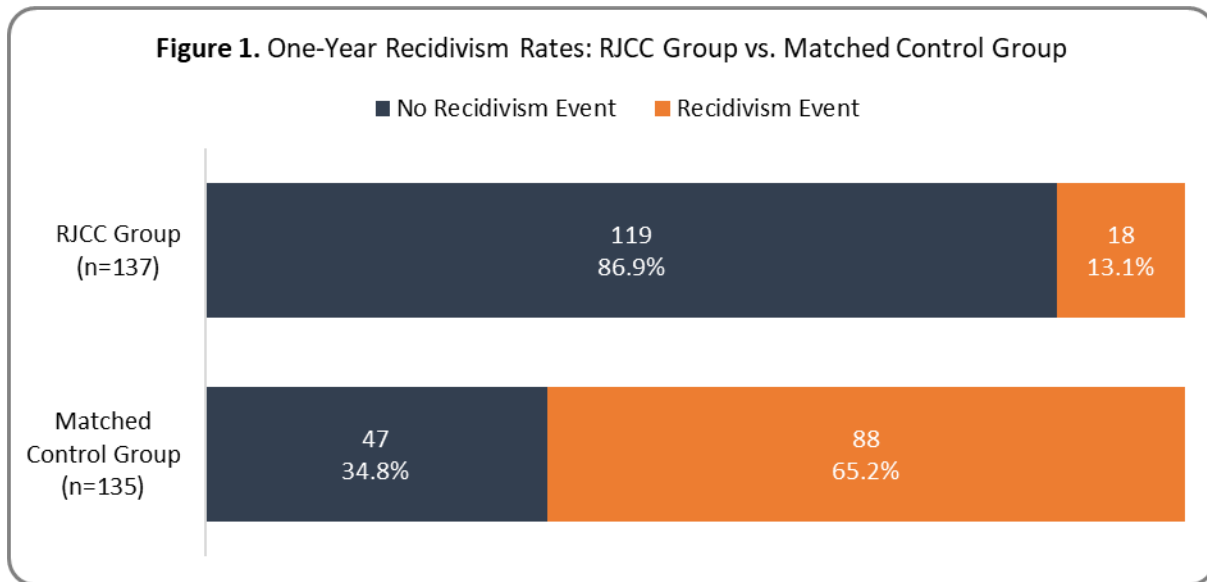


Table 3 provides detail on new criminal activity among RJCC participants and the matched comparison group.

- The most common new charges among RJCC participants were felony aggravated weapons possession (three cases), possession of a controlled substance (two cases) and misdemeanor battery (three cases). Seven individuals in the matched control group had violent new charges, including one charged with murder or attempted murder, versus one participant in the RJCCs.⁴
- Among the 94 RJCC participants with cases filed between 2020 and 2022 who had their charges dismissed, the electronic docket reflects that 10 (10.6%) had new charges after graduation and before March 31, 2023. These included five charged with felony weapons possession, two charged with misdemeanor battery, two charged with drug possession, and one charged with resisting an officer.⁵

⁴ This individual was arrested for criminal sexual assault one month after admission to the RJCC.

⁵ About three quarters of graduates have been in the community after graduation for less than one year.

**Table 3. Rate of New Criminal Activity (NCA) Within One Year of Release by Top Charge:
RJCC Group vs. Matched Control Group**

Rate of New Criminal Activity by Top Charge of New Offense		RJCC Group		Control Group	
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent
No New Criminal Activity		119	86.9%	47	34.8%
New Violent Felony Filing	Murder	0	--	1	0.7%
	Agg Battery	0	--	1	0.7%
	Agg Assault	0	--	1	0.7%
	Agg Criminal Sexual Assault	1	0.7%	0	--
	Agg Robbery	0	--	3	2.2%
	Robbery	0	--	1	0.7%
New Felony Filing	Discharge of Firearm	0	--	2	1.5%
	Armed Violence	0	--	2	1.5%
	Armed Habitual Criminal	0	--	2	1.5%
	Agg UUW – Possession	3	2.2%	23	17.0%
	UUW – Possession	0	--	3	2.2%
	Other Weapon Offenses	1	0.7%	1	0.7%
	Burglary	0	--	1	0.7%
	Motor Vehicle Theft	1	0.7%	2	1.5%
	Drug Delivery	3	0.7%	5	3.7%
	PCS	2	1.5%	6	4.4%
	Other Offenses	0	--	5	3.7%
New Misdemeanor Filing	Battery	3	2.2%	14	10.4%
	Assault	1	0.7%	1	0.7%
	UUW – Possession	1	0.7%	0	--
	Other Weapon Offenses	1	0.7%	1	0.7%
	Theft	0	--	1	0.7%
	Retail Theft	0	--	2	1.5%
	Criminal Damage & Trespass to Prop	0	--	3	2.2%
	Drug Delivery	0	--	1	0.7%
	PCS	2	1.5%	1	0.7%
	Sex Offenses	0	--	1	0.7%
Other Offenses	1	0.7%	4	3.0%	
Total		137	100.0%	135	100.0%

II. Supporting Employment and Educational Development (SEED) Program

Characteristics of SEED Participants

Table 4 shows the demographic and case characteristics of SEED participants. Unlike the majority of RJCC participants, the SEED participants were charged with drug offenses.

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Individuals Who Enrolled in SEED Program from January 1, 2021 through February 1, 2023

Demographic Characteristics		Number	Percent
Gender	Male	160	88.4%
	Female	21	11.6%
Race	Black	126	69.6%
	White	39	21.5%
	Asian	4	2.2%
	Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.6%
	Other	11	6.1%
Ethnicity	Hispanic-Latino	40	22.1%
	Non-Hispanic/Latino	141	77.9%
Age Group	18-20	27	14.9%
	21-23	52	28.7%
	24-26	44	24.3%
	27-29	43	23.8%
	30+	15	8.3%
Charge Type	MFG/DEL Cannabis	102	56.4%
	MFG/DEL Other Controlled Substance	50	27.6%
	Other Amt. Narc. Schedule I & II	29	16.0%
Total		181	

Case Processing - SEED Participants

As shown in **Table 5**, of the 181 individuals who had agreed to participate in SEED between January 2021 and February 2023, 45.3% were still active, 33.1% had successfully graduated, and 21.5% were unsuccessfully discharged from the program (includes 4 participants who died during the program).

Table 5. Case Status on February 28, 2023: SEED Court		
Case Status as of 2/28/2023	Number	Percent
Pending on 2/28/2023	82	45.3%
Terminations		
• Discharged Before Beginning Orientation	16	
• Discharged During Orientation Phase	6	
• Discharged During 12-Month Programming	13	
• Deceased	4	
Total Terminations	39	21.6%
Completions		
• Graduated	60	33.1%
Total	181	100.0%

New Criminal Activity – SEED Participants

Table 6 shows new criminal activity among SEED Court participants through February 2023. Overall, 39 of the 181 participants (21.5%) had a new charge. It should be noted that these rates are not directly comparable to the RJCC rates which were calculated over a standard one-year observation time frame. However, it is apparent that there are more new charges among SEED participants than among RJCC participants overall. This finding aligns with the observation that new criminal activity among those charged with drug offenses is higher than among those with weapons possession offenses.

Table 6. New Criminal Activity of SEED Participants

New Criminal Activity	NCA Count	Participants	Percent of Participants
Pending Start of Orientation			
• AGG UUW - Possession	1		
Total Pending Participants with New Charges	1	38	2.6%
Active Participants			
• MFG/DEL Cannabis	6		
• PCS	1		
• Battery - Cause Bodily Harm	1		
• MFG/DEL Heroin	1		
• Delivery of a Controlled Substance	1		
• Soliciting Unlawful Business	1		
Total Active Participants with New Charges	11	44	25.0%
Terminations			
• AGG UUW	4		
• MFG/DEL Cannabis	3		
• Domestic Battery	3		
• Armed Habitual Criminal	2		
• Other Amt. Narc. Schedule I & II	2		
• Aggravated Battery	1		
• Vehicular Hijacking	1		
• Receive/Poss./Sell Stolen Vehicle	1		
• Retail Theft	1		
• PCS	1		
• Criminal Damage to Property	1		
Total Terminations with New Charges	20	39	51.3%
Completions – Graduates			
• MFG/DEL Cannabis	4		
• Aggravated Assault	1		
• Poss. Title/Registration Not Authorized	1		
• UUW- Poss. Firearm W/O Valid FOID Card	1		
• Total Graduates with New Charges	7	60	11.7%

Conclusions and Limitations

Early program outcomes suggest that RJCCs are making an impact at reducing new criminal activity among young people involved in the criminal justice system when compared to similar defendants who undergo standard criminal case processing. The current analysis is particularly robust in that the control group comes from similar communities as the RJCC participants, which controls to some extent for environmental and neighborhood factors. Only six RJCC participants in this cohort have been convicted of the original felony charge and 94 have had their charges dismissed, avoiding the adverse consequences of a felony conviction on one’s record. Less than one in five participants were arrested on any new charge within one year of release versus two thirds of the comparison group. Only one participant in the RJCCs has been charged with a new serious violent crime after release, versus seven in the control group.

An analysis of SEED Court recidivism showed a somewhat higher overall rate of new criminal activity; 21.5% of SEED court participants had new charges vs 13.1% of RJCC participants. As noted above, although their ages are similar, the populations enrolled into these two courts are different, in that the SEED court admits only drug manufacturing/distribution cases whereas the majority of RJCC participants have been charged with weapons possession. However, we can conclude that the rate of new charges among SEED participants is higher than among RJCC participants. This aligns with the general pattern of greater recidivism among drug defendants than among weapons possession defendants. In addition, the analysis of RJCCs shows that RJCC participation may have prevented violent crime, suggesting that the RJCCs are a good investment from a societal point of view.

There are several limitations to this analysis. The analysis is limited by the short time frame, which does not permit an evaluation of the outcomes of the new charges. We observe only whether a new charge is filed and not whether the defendant was found guilty. Only the first new charge since release is reported here. Finally, in the case of the RJCC analysis, although the matching process creates between-group equivalence on age, race, gender, and other important factors, there may be other important unmeasured factors that influence RJCC referral, admission, and successful program participation. These potential unmeasured confounders are reason for some caution when understanding the effects of RJCC participation on reducing new criminal activity when compared to the control group.

Appendix: Demographic and Case Characteristics of Matched Comparison Sample

Appendix Table A. Demographic and Case Characteristics of Matched Comparison Sample (n = 211)			
Demographic Characteristics		Number	Percent
Race	Black	169	80.1%
	Hispanic	39	18.5%
	White	3	1.4%
Gender	Male	197	93.4%
	Female	14	6.6%
Age	18	24	11.4%
	19	15	7.1%
	20	29	13.7%
	21	20	9.5%
	22	29	13.7%
	23	19	9.0%
	24	17	8.1%
	25	21	10.0%
	26	10	4.7%
	27	12	5.7%
	28	7	3.3%
	29	8	3.8%
Top Charge Characteristics		Number	Percent
Charge class	Class X	1	0.5%
	Class 1	2	0.9%
	Class 2	12	5.7%
	Class 3	5	2.4%
	Class 4	186	88.2%
	Class A	3	1.4%
	Class B	1	0.5%
	Class C	1	0.5%
Charge Category	Person	2	0.9%
	Weapon	179	84.8%
	Property	11	5.2%
	Drug	18	8.5%
	Other	1	0.5%