

Program Profile: **Vehicle for Change**

Prepared for
The Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council

Prepared by
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**ILLINOIS MOTOR VEHICLE
THEFT PREVENTION COUNCIL**

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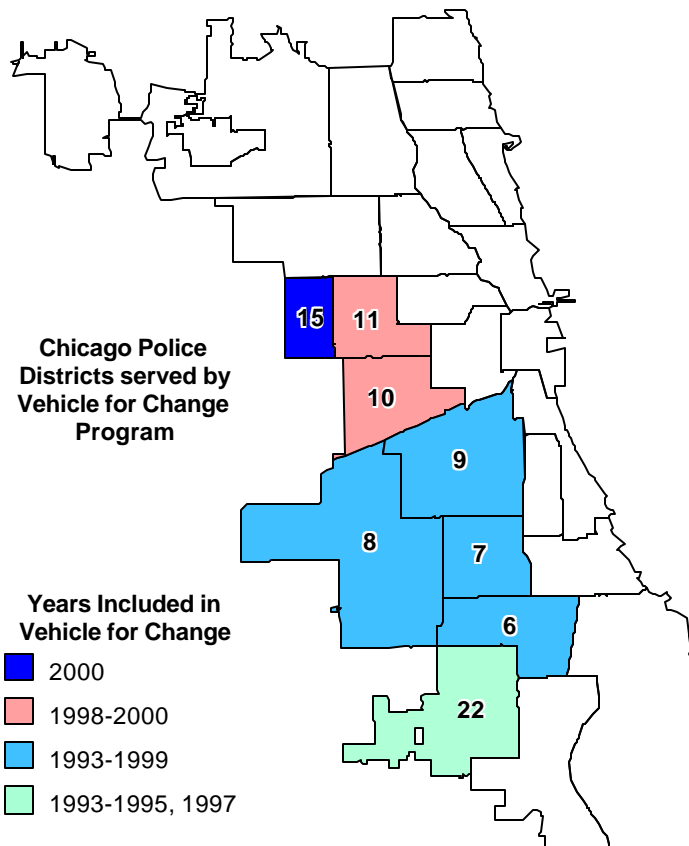
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Introduction

The Vehicle for Change Program targets first-time juvenile offenders between the ages of 13 and 16 charged with Possession of a Stolen Motor Vehicle (PSMV) and other auto-related crimes. The program diverts these youth from the court system into a nine-month intensive social services program. Vehicle for Change serves Cook County, with services currently targeted to Chicago's West Side (Chicago Police districts 10, 11, and 15). The program's service area has changed several times since the program began in 1993 (see map below).

The Office of the Cook County State's Attorney works together with a service provider to provide the necessary screening, selection, and services to the juveniles. From 1992 to 1994, United Charities provided these services; from 1995 to 1999, Metropolitan Family Services was the service provider of the program. In 2000, the Westside Association for Community Action Foundation (WACA) became the service provider for the program.

Cook County, which includes the city of Chicago, is the state's most populous county. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Cook County had a population of 5.2 million in 1999. Seventeen percent (17%) of Cook County's population consists of juveniles.¹



¹ United States Bureau of the Census estimate. Includes juveniles age 5-16.

Motor Vehicle Theft by Juveniles

Juveniles account for a disproportionate share of motor vehicle thefts. Although they comprise only 17 percent of the U.S. population², in 1998 juveniles accounted for 36 percent of motor vehicle theft arrests in the United States.³ In Illinois, juveniles make up less than 18 percent of the population, but accounted for 39 percent of motor vehicle theft arrests in the state in 1998.⁴

A 1995 Council-funded research study found that many career auto thieves began stealing cars as juveniles.⁵ The researchers recommended identifying potential career car thieves as early as possible and diverting them into programs with high levels of supervision.

Juveniles steal cars for a variety of reasons, including:

- Immediate gratification
- Profit obtained by selling the car to a chop shop or drug dealer
- Excitement from the risk of being caught
- Peer status and prestige
- Gang initiation

For youth that become involved with gangs, auto theft may indicate the start of a criminal career. In addition to using car theft as a form of gang initiation, gang members often steal cars to commit other crimes, such as drive-by shootings or transporting drugs.⁶ Gang-affiliated youth are substantially more likely to commit auto theft than non-gang members.⁷ A study by Ohio's Office of Criminal Justice Services found that the criminal careers of gang members begin with property offenses, such as burglary and auto theft, and progress within two years to drug-related and violent crimes.⁸ The study also suggests that the best time to intervene is during the early years of gang involvement.

² Juveniles age 5-16; United States Bureau of the Census, 1990.

³ **Crime in the United States 1998**. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. 1999: table 38.

⁴ Percentage based on ICJIA **Arrest Data Collection Project**.

⁵ Reinertsen, Robert R. and Victor D. Lofgreen. **Research in Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention: Identifying Strategies that Work**. Report to the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council, 1995.

⁶ **1998 Statewide Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Strategy**, Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council, 1998.

⁷ Huff, Ronald C. "Comparing the Criminal Behavior of Youth Gangs and At-Risk Youths." **NIJ Research in Brief, October 1998**.

⁸ *ibid.*

Program Summary

The Vehicle for Change Program began in September 1992. The program targets first-time juvenile offenders charged with Possession of a Stolen Motor Vehicle (PSMV; 625 ILCS 5/4-103) and other auto-related crimes, such as Criminal Trespass to Vehicle (720 ILCS 5/21-2) and Burglary to Auto (720 ILCS 5/19-1).

The Cook County State's Attorney's Office identifies potential candidates for the program and refers them to the program service provider (currently Westside Association for Community Action Foundation, or WACA). Together, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office and the service provider determine which referred youth are eligible for the program. Eligibility is based on the following criteria:

- Youth is between the ages of 13 and 16
- Youth resides in the police districts served by the program
- Criminal History:
 - No prior arrests for PSMV
 - No prior arrests for violent offenses
 - Number of station adjustments prior to PSMV charge. A station adjustment occurs when a juvenile is taken into custody, brought to the police department, and then released without formal charges being filed.
 - Number of court-referred arrests prior to PSMV charge. A court-referred arrest occurs when a juvenile is taken into custody, brought to the police department, released with a parent's signature, and given a court date.
 - Whether the youth has been detained for *any* prior charge
 - Period of time over which arrests took place
 - Nature of the arrests (violent crime vs. property crime)
 - Whether youth has ever been on probation for a previous charge
- Attitude of youth and family at intake

Referred youth are analyzed on a case by case basis, taking all of the above factors into account. Those who are deemed eligible are given the opportunity to enroll. Most of the eligible youth elect to participate. Some refuse to participate in the program; some agree to participate, but fail to show up for their intake appointments. Those who miss two scheduled intake appointments are considered 'no-shows' and lose their eligibility for the program.

Youth who enroll in Vehicle for Change receive nine months of social services, including individual counseling as well as group counseling sessions, home visits, school contacts, tutoring, and group recreational activities.

Juveniles who are arrested for another offense while enrolled in Vehicle for Change are pulled from the program. During 1994 and 1995, youths who were re-arrested after completing most of the program were classified as 'unsuccessful completions,' rather than pulling the youth from the program and filing their original charges back to court. Youth who fail to comply with program rules and guidelines are dropped from the

program. Youths who successfully complete all the program requirements graduate from the program. Graduation occurs at a special ceremony held twice a year.

Program Activity

The statistics in Table 1 below are drawn from Vehicle for Change year-end performance reports that are submitted to Council staff. Due to discrepancies in reporting procedures, the number of juveniles enrolled may not equal the total number of juveniles who left or completed the program (those who were dropped, pulled, or who graduated). Definitions for Table 1 are as follows:

Referred—number of juveniles referred to the program by the state’s attorney’s office

Enrolled—number of juveniles newly enrolled during a program year. This does not include youths that enrolled during the previous year but had not yet completed the program.

Dropped—number of juveniles dropped from the program due to non-compliance with program guidelines.

Pulled—number of juveniles pulled from the program due to re-arrest.

Unsuccessfully Completed—number of juveniles who were re-arrested near the end of the nine-month program. The program director chose to classify these as ‘unsuccessful completions’ rather than pulling the youth from the program and filing their original Possession of a Stolen Motor Vehicle (PSMV) charges back to court.

Graduated—number of juveniles who successfully completed the program. This number includes youth that entered the program during the previous year.

Table 1
Vehicle for Change Program Activity

Program Year	Referred	Enrolled	Dropped	Pulled	Unsuccessfully Completed	Graduated
1993 ^a	211	145	8	34	----	16
1994 ^b	186	119	19	50	3	85
1995	146	57 ^c	20	34	7	68
1996	72	50	1	12	----	43
1997	98	68	17	5	----	29
1998	134	69	17	9	----	35
1999	85	55	31	4	----	29
Totals	932	563	113	148	10	305

^a September 1992 to September 1993.

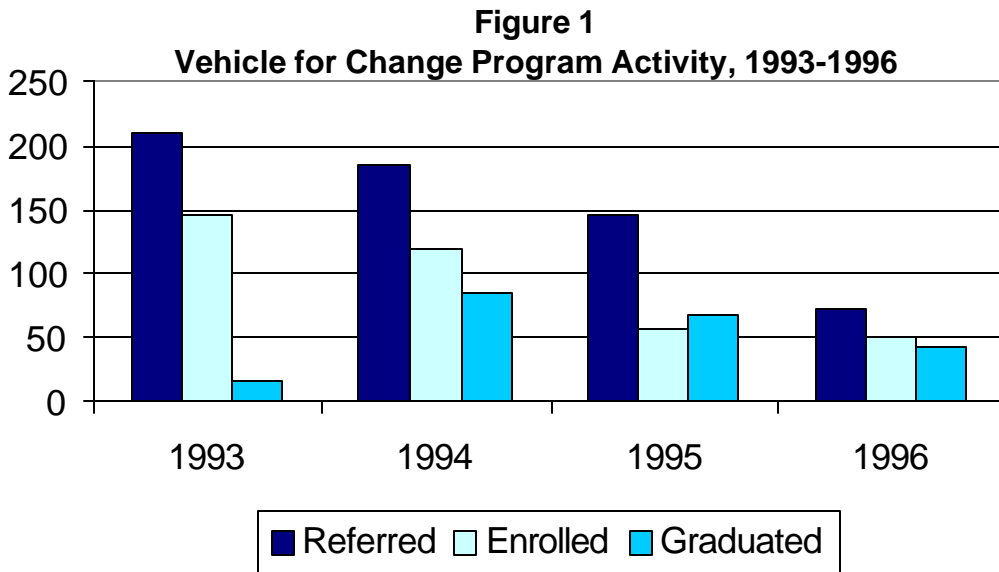
^b September 1993 to December 1994.

^c ICJIA estimate based on number of youths that graduated before September.

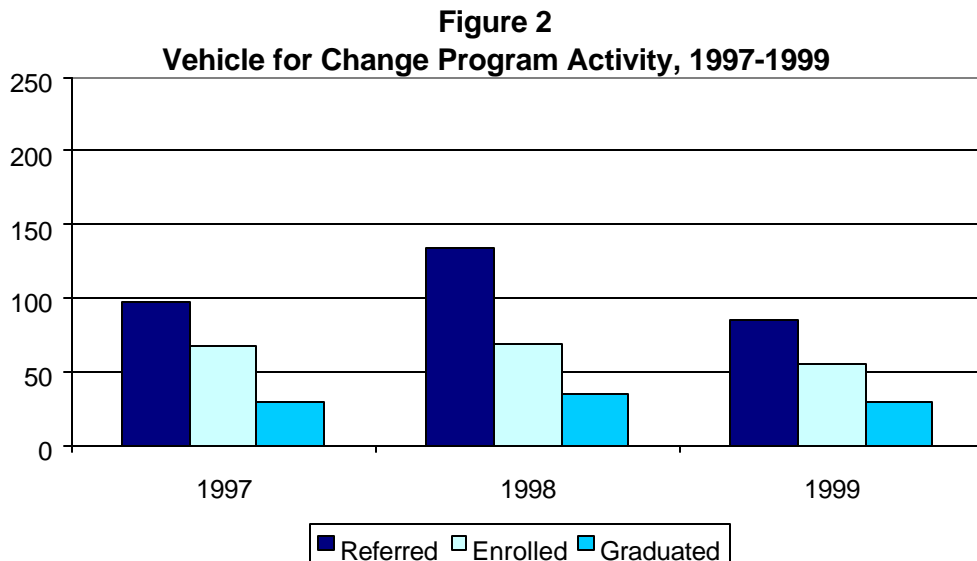
Source: *Final Performance Reports*, Vehicle for Change program.

Because reporting procedures changed in 1997, statistics for 1993-1996 are considered separately from those for 1997-1999.

From 1993 to 1996, 615 juveniles were referred to the Vehicle for Change program from the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. Of these 615 youths, 371 were enrolled in the program and 212 graduated. Figure 1 shows the number of youths referred, enrolled, and graduated for each program year during this period.



From 1997 through 1999, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office referred 317 juveniles to the Vehicle for Change program. Of these 317 youths, 192 were enrolled in the program and 93 graduated. Figure 2 shows the number of youths referred, enrolled, and graduated for each program year during this period.



Funding Summary

The Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Act that took effect on January 1, 1991 created the Illinois Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Council. The Council has the statutory responsibility to prevent, combat, and reduce motor vehicle theft in Illinois.

The Act established the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund, a special trust fund in the State Treasury, from which the Council makes grants to eligible applicants for programs that address the problem of motor vehicle theft in Illinois. The Act requires all insurance companies licensed to write physical damage coverage for private passenger motor vehicles in Illinois to contribute to the fund. Each insurance company pays annually into the trust fund an amount equal to \$1 for each earned car year of exposure for physical damage insurance coverage during the previous calendar year. About \$5.6 million is collected each year.

The Vehicle for Change Program is funded by the Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Trust Fund. The program consists of two separate grants—one to the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office (CCSAO), and one to the program’s service provider. The table below lists amount granted to each agency for each program year, along with a total for each year (Table 2).

Table 2
Vehicle for Change
Funding by Program Year

Year	CCSAO	Service Provider*	Total
1993	\$62,032	\$187,968	\$250,000
1994	\$81,329	\$503,066	\$584,395
1995	\$70,682	\$405,418	\$476,100
1996	\$42,020	\$286,185	\$328,205
1997	\$44,625	\$304,212	\$348,837
1998	\$43,131	\$304,101	\$347,232
1999	\$46,585	\$303,466	\$350,051
2000	\$50,618	\$200,000	\$250,618
TOTAL	\$693,870	\$2,241,568	\$2,935,438

***Service Providers:**

1992-1994 United Charities

1995-1999 Metropolitan Family Services

2000 Westside Association for Community Action Foundation (WACA)

