



FORMER PROJECT BUILD CLIENTS AND ADULT CONVICTIONS

Abstract: One success measure of Project BUILD, Durham’s gang intervention program, is the number of former clients who avoid adult convictions. Data in this report shows that only a small percentage of clients who successfully completed Project BUILD have criminal convictions in North Carolina adult courts.

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Background

Project BUILD (Building, Uplifting and Impacting Lives Daily) is a youth gang intervention program that was formed in 2009 and operates out of Durham County’s Community Interventions and Support Services department in Durham, North Carolina. The program utilizes the evidence-based Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model to serve individuals, ages 14-21, who are active and former gang members, or who are at high risk of joining a gang.

Durham adopted the *OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model* in 2009. The model calls for an Intervention Team where “formal information sharing takes place at regularly scheduled meetings and where the progress of project youth is discussed relative to their individual case plans”. In Durham, Project BUILD serves as the Intervention Team.

While many gang prevention and intervention programs in North Carolina and nationwide have come and gone, Durham’s Project BUILD continues to operate effectively since its inception in 2009. Similar in longevity to Durham is the gang intervention program in Houston (Mayor’s Office of Gang Prevention and Intervention), which also utilizes the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model. Durham and Houston regularly collaborate and share best practices. This collaboration has taken place via multiple cross-site visits.

Since its inception, Project BUILD has mostly served clients with highly elevated risks and needs. A juvenile risk assessment tool that measures risks, needs, and protective factors for at-risk or juvenile justice-involved youth, YASI (Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument) indicate that at any given time, a significant percentage of Project BUILD clients are classified as “high-risk”.

Data revealing the types of program completion (successful, satisfactory, or unsuccessful) as well as recidivism data are indicators of Project BUILD’s impact on clients. Data indicated that program participation has helped most clients who exit the program avoid gangs or reduce/eliminate gang involvement. Other results of the program for participants include:

- ✓ Successfully returning to school after a suspension or confinement
- ✓ Graduating from high school or a trade school
- ✓ Connection to employment
- ✓ Successful completion of probation
- ✓ Connection to healthcare
- ✓ Connection to mental health services

Selection of clients for study

The intent of this study was to identify the percentage of Project BUILD clients who are *not* convicted of a crime in North Carolina within one year or more of leaving the program.

For the purposes of this study, a database of all clients who had participated in, and exited, the Project BUILD program between the calendar years of 2015 and 2021 was used. The total number of program exits for those years was 199.

Additional criteria were added which reduced the number of clients in the study. To get an accurate percentage of clients who were not convicted of a crime in North Carolina after being out of the program for a year or more, clients were eliminated if they did not complete the program successfully, if they had not spent a minimum of six months in the program, or if they had not been eligible for adult charges for at least one year.¹ These criteria reduced the number of former clients in the study from 199 to 141 as shown in the table below.

Study eligibility criteria	
Number of Project BUILD program client exits (2015-2021)	199
Number of Project BUILD clients meeting study criteria 1) Spent at least 6 months in the Project BUILD program 2) Successfully completed the Project BUILD program 3) Attended Project BUILD between 2015 and 2021 4) Eligible for adult charges in North Carolina for at least 1 year	141
TOTAL PROJECT BUILD CLIENTS MEETING ALL CRITERIA	141

Determining the existence of criminal charges

A publicly-accessible database, the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction Offender Public Information – Offender Search² was used to determine which clients had adult criminal convictions in North Carolina. Names, and if available, dates of birth, were entered into the database.

¹ For example, a client may have exited the program in 2020 at age 15 and not been eligible for adult charges until age 18 due to the Raise the Age initiative

² <https://webapps.doc.state.nc.us/opi/offendersearch.do?method=view>

If a conviction was found under a name, additional efforts were taken to ensure accuracy. Efforts included matching birth dates and/or ages. If there was a conviction, the database displayed the following information:

- Primary crime
- Arrest date
- Conviction date
- County of conviction
- Whether the crime was a felony or misdemeanor
- Incarceration status (if any)
- Probation/Parole/Post-release status (if any)

Criminal Convictions (all)

Of the 141 clients in this study, 118 (or 84%) were *not* convicted of a crime in North Carolina courts by the time of this report.

For those who were convicted of a crime by North Carolina courts (23, or 16%) the amount of time from completing Project BUILD to conviction was analyzed. The range was from a low of 3 months to a high of 56 months.

The convictions were classified as crimes against persons, property, or society. These can be defined as follows:

Crimes against persons are those whose victims are always individuals. Examples of crimes against persons include assault, murder, and rape.

Crimes against property are those where the object is to obtain money, property, or some other benefit. Examples of crimes against property are burglary, robbery, and bribery.

Crimes against society are those that violate society's prohibition against engaging in certain types of activity; Examples of crimes against society are drug violations, gambling, and prostitution. They are typically victimless crimes in which property is not the object.

Type of crime resulting in conviction	Number
Crime against person	13
Crime against property	7
Crime against society	3

The convictions were also classified as either a felony or a misdemeanor. Of the 23 convictions, 15 were felony charges and 8 were misdemeanors.

Several convictions were for first-degree or second-degree murder. 7 former clients are currently incarcerated with projected release dates ranging from July 2023 to September 2052.

Criminal Convictions (within 1 year of program exit)

In the analysis above of all convictions, it can be noted that as time passes (for example 4 or 5 years) more convictions occur.

Another, and perhaps more scientific way of looking at the topic is to identify only the number of convictions that occurred within 1 year of program exit.

Of the 141 clients in this study, 134 (or 95%) were *not* convicted of a crime in North Carolina courts within 12 months of successful program exit.

Reasons for Success

The success rate (95% of former Project BUILD clients were not convicted of a crime in North Carolina within 12 months of program exit) can be attributed to several factors.

- Parent/caregiver participation and engagement are essential elements of the program. Coping skills, goals, and strategies identified by program staff are designed to be reinforced at home by parents/caregivers.
- The focus on completing educational requirements (i.e. graduation from high school) has made it possible for many clients to find pathways to legitimate employment. Due to a longstanding relationship with the Durham Public School system, Project BUILD staff has access to clients in the school setting and access to school counselors and social workers who interact with Project BUILD clients.
- Project BUILD staff are credible messengers and are very familiar with the life experiences of program participants. This has resonated with clients and helped them sustain engagement.
- A diverse group of stakeholders assists with case management. The Intervention Team, which meets regularly to review individual cases is comprised of Project BUILD staff, law enforcement³, juvenile justice court counselors, mental health and other service providers, Durham Public School representatives, and others.
- Project BUILD staff continue to maintain contact/relationships with clients following program exit whenever possible. This not only adds a level of accountability but is an indication to the client that someone has an active interest in them as a person.

Summary

Project BUILD is a long-standing and effective gang intervention program. One measurement of success is the percentage of clients who complete the program and then do *not* receive a criminal conviction in North Carolina. In a study of former clients from 2015 to 2021, only 5% were convicted of an adult crime in North Carolina within 1 year of program exit.

³ This includes representatives from the Durham Police Department who often have updated information on various gangs and associates, and representatives from the Durham County Sheriff's Office, who manage the School Resource Officers embedded in middle schools and high schools