Submitted by Dennis Schrantz

THE PEW CENTER ON THE STATES

Putting Public Safety First:

13 Strategies for Successful Supervision and Reentry

Public Safety Policy Brief

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Executive Summary

More than five million people are under community supervision—either probation or parole—on any given day in the United States. Success rates among these offenders are not high: more than 40 percent of probationers and more than half of parolees do not complete their supervision terms successfully. In fact, parole violators account for almost 35 percent of admissions to state prisons, and nearly half of local jail inmates were on probation or parole when they were arrested.

High failure rates, the continued rise in prison costs, the release each year of more than 700,000 persons from confinement, and the mounting economic downturn—all of these trends present policy makers and corrections executives with a rare opportunity, even an imperative, to reform probation and parole in ways that will keep communities safe and save scarce public funds. Fortunately, decades of learning in the field and a growing research base has led to a consensus among many corrections professionals about what needs to be done to achieve better results.

That consensus is reflected in the 13 strategies presented here—strategies that can reduce recidivism and hold offenders accountable for their actions while also cutting substance abuse and unemployment, and restoring family bonds. Even modest reductions in recidivism will result in fewer crimes, fewer victims, and budget savings for states and localities. Given the sheer numbers of people on probation and parole and the cost to society of new crimes they commit, solid execution of these strategies by community supervision agencies could dramatically improve public safety and free corrections dollars for other pressing public priorities.

THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

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This document was written for the Pew Center on the States' Public Safety Performance Project by Amy L. Solomon, Jesse Jannetta, Brian Elderbroom, Laura Winterfield, and Jenny W.L. Osborne of the Urban Institute; Peggy Burke and Richard P. Stroker of the Center for Effective Public Policy; Edward E. Rhine of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction; and William D. Burrell, a corrections management consultant.

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1. Define Success as Recidivism Reduction and Measure Performance

Probation and parole agencies—like all agencies—should define their mission, be clear about criteria for success and set benchmarks for performance. Most practitioners would agree that public safety is, and always has been, an important goal of their agencies. But the typical strategies employed to accomplish that goal tend to focus on catching offenders when they do something wrong—"trail 'em, nail 'em and jail 'em" as the saying goes.

Failing to define success as recidivism reduction, and holding supervision officers accountable to that standard, will result in a continued emphasis on "outputs" (such as the number of contacts probation officers have with their probationers), at the expense of the public safety outcomes that matter most. In order to accomplish their public safety mission, parole and probation agencies should adopt risk reduction and behavior change strategies and measure their performance against the standard of recidivism reduction, substance abuse, employment, victim restitution and other reintegration outcomes.

2. Tailor Conditions of Supervision

Probationers and parolees are often subject to a long, generic list of conditions of supervision that may be unrealistic for any individual to meet, let alone those struggling to hold a job, support their families and stay sober. Many in the field agree that conditions of release should instead reflect what Carl Wicklund, executive director of the American Probation and Parole Association, refers to as the "three R's" of supervision conditions: Parole and probation conditions should be Realistic, Relevant, and Research-based. Realistic conditions are few in number and attainable, and include only those rules for which the agency is prepared to consistently hold supervisees accountable. Relevant conditions are tailored to the individual risks and needs most likely to result in new criminal behavior. Research-based conditions are supported by evidence that compliance with them will change behavior and result in improved public safety or reintegration outcomes.

3. Focus Resources on Higher Risk Offenders

Research has demonstrated that evidence-based interventions directed towards offenders with a moderate to high risk of committing new crimes will result in better outcomes for both offenders and the community. Conversely, treatment resources targeted to low-risk offenders produce little, if any, positive effect. In fact, despite the appealing logic of involving low-risk individuals in intensive programming to prevent them from graduating to more serious behavior, numerous studies show that certain programs may actually worsen their outcomes. By limiting supervision and services for low-risk offenders and focusing on those who present greater risk, parole and probation agencies can devote limited treatment and supervision resources where they will provide the most benefit to public safety.

4. Frontload Supervision Resources

Research clearly identifies the period immediately following release from prison and jail as a particularly high-risk time for offenders. Not only is the risk of new crimes greatest during this period, but offenders often have a heightened need for substance abuse treatment, mental health, housing and other services as well. Parole and probation agencies should respond by concentrating resources in the first few days and weeks of supervision, including reaching into correctional institutions to begin the case planning process for those who will be supervised after release.

Frontloading resources has the obvious benefit of providing oversight and treatment when it is most needed. It also helps identify the cases that warrant enhanced supervision and those that do not. Offenders who consistently meet parole and probation conditions may require less supervision later on, thus offsetting the cost of shifting resources upfront. Simply increasing surveillance without a strategy for addressing offenders' criminal risk factors, however, will most likely lead to finding more violations without affecting behavior change or preventing crime.

5. Implement Earned Discharge

Providing incentives for meeting case-specific goals of supervision is a powerful tool to enhance individual motivation and promote positive behavior change. Many experts recommend a system of earned discharge whereby lower risk probationers and parolees can earn their way off supervision by adhering to specific goals and strict guidelines. An opportunity to reduce a term of supervision can be a strong incentive for offenders to meet supervision requirements, find and retain a job, stay sober or in treatment, and participate in the programs most likely to reduce recidivism. It also further helps supervision agencies frontload and concentrate their resources on higher-risk offenders.

6. Supervise Offenders in Their Communities

In a system of place-based supervision, parole and probation officers have geographically-based caseloads and may have "satellite" offices located in the communities in which high concentrations of their supervisees live and work. By supervising offenders where they live, fostering relationships with those who know them best, and becoming familiar with local resources and high-risk areas, parole and probation officers are much better positioned to manage their caseloads. Further, organizing caseloads by neighborhood efficiently allocates scarce resources and reduces costly and time-consuming officer travel. This model contrasts sharply with the conventional model of "fortress" supervision, in which officers hunker down in large, centrally located headquarters and see offenders only from across a desk in the office environment.

7. Engage Partners to Expand Intervention Capacity

Given the substantial treatment, health, housing, education and employment needs of parolees and probationers, it is essential for supervision agencies to partner with other organizations such as community health care providers, housing authorities, substance abuse treatment providers, mental health service providers, workforce development boards, faith-based organizations, and other community organizations. Jails and prisons also are critical partners, as they typically gather information, assessments and program intervention information that will be critical to successful supervision. Greater coordination between such organizations will enhance the capacity of supervision agencies to help keep offenders crime- and drug-free.

8. Assess Criminal Risk and Need Factors

Supervision agencies should use reliable assessment instruments to identify both risk and need factors and link the results to a supervision case plan. Assessment instruments analyze offenders' criminal histories in combination with their responses during structured interviews and produce a score that indicates whether they are at low, medium or high risk of reoffending. Research has shown that once these tools are scientifically validated for the specific offender populations to be supervised, they are far better than individual judgment at identifying risk levels and the attitudes and behaviors that drive offenders' criminal activity.

There is broad agreement among experts that such instruments should be used to determine the intensity of supervision and types of services that offenders receive. Some jurisdictions are beginning to use assessment tools prior to sentencing. This allows judges to use the instruments' predictive power to help make decisions about whether to sentence a defendant to incarceration or what conditions of probation to set. By identifying high-risk offenders, as well as those who may require minimal monitoring and intervention, assessment instruments serve as a guide for the efficient use of resources.

9. Balance Surveillance and Treatment in Case Plans

Case plans should reflect individual criminal risk factors and treatment needs in addition to surveillance requirements and obligations to meet with the probation or parole officer. Research has repeatedly shown that a combination of surveillance and treatment is more effective at reducing recidivism than a singular reliance on monitoring and control alone. Cognitive-behavioral interventions, and certain community-based drug treatment, and education and job assistance programs have been proven to contribute to lower recidivism rates and should be considered in the development of supervision plans.

Ideally, supervision case plans will be built on empirical risk and need assessments, incorporate offender goals, enhance individual motivation, and consider the input of stakeholders such as corrections officials, law enforcement, victims, family members, and community-based service organizations. Assessment and case planning for offenders returning from prisons and jails should begin shortly after admission and be carefully coordinated with community supervision staff to assure more successful reentry.

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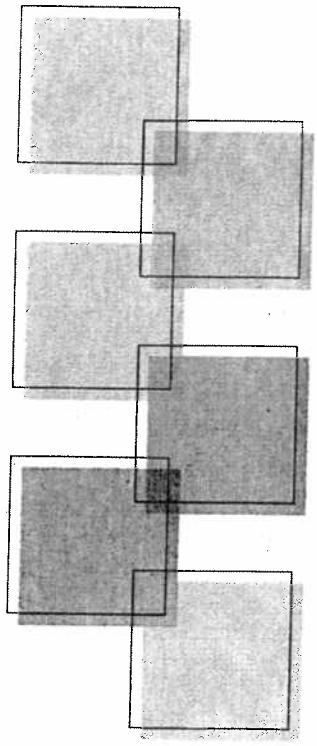

What Works

Effective Recidivism Reduction and Risk-Focused Prevention Programs

A Compendium of Evidence-Based Options for Preventing New and Persistent Criminal Behavior

February, 2008

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Section 5: Effective Recidivism Reduction Programs

At risk for recidivism

In Colorado, over 95,000 individuals were on probation, in community corrections or juvenile placements, or under the jurisdiction of the Colorado Department of Corrections on December 31, 2007.[1] Thousands more were incarcerated in county jails. Most of these offenders under correctional supervision – more than 65,000 – were living in communities across the state. Of those behind prison bars, more than 9 out of 10 will eventually return to the community. Finding ways to reduce the recidivism rate for these offenders is a critical public safety challenge.

Defining recidivism

Recidivism rates typically refer to the proportion of offenders who commit a subsequent crime following contact with the justice system. Sometimes the rate includes those who have been placed in prison because they violated the conditions of supervision. High rates of recidivism are a principal reason why Colorado's prison population and correctional costs are rising. A sizeable percentage of inmates released from prison today - as many as 49 out of every 100 - will be back behind bars within three years. Among adult probationers, about 20% fail due to technical violations and many of these eventually are resentenced to prison.[2] Of the adults who successfully complete probation, 8% commit a new crime within one year. Breaking this cycle of repeat offending is an essential first step in curbing correctional costs.

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Impact of Rehabilitation Services on Recidivism

The end of rehabilitation

In 1975, Doug Lipton, Robert Martinson and Judith Wilks published their famous study on the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs for criminal offenders.[3] In a preview of the findings released the year before, Martinson stated that "With few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism."[4] Widely interpreted as "nothing works" in offender rehabilitation, the Martinson report is often cited as the beginning of a shift away from more than six decades of emphasis on correctional rehabilitation and toward punishment and deterrence in correctional policy. In 1979, Martinson recanted his earlier position in an article published in the Hofstra Law Review, but "nothing works" had permanently entered the lexicon of criminal justice policy.[5]

Irrefutable evidence

More than 30 years of research since the Martinson report has produced a body of evidence that clearly contradicts the "nothing works" thesis. In 1987, for example, Gendreau and Ross reviewed more than 200 studies on offender rehabilitation and concluded that effective recidivism reduction programs were conducted in a variety of settings, with both juvenile and adult offenders.[6] More recently, MacKenzie

Rehabilitation programs can and do work. Summarizing this body of literature is the purpose of this section of the compendium.

(2006) examined various correctional strategies using meta-analysis, simulations and other methods and concluded: "There is sufficient evidence to reject the nothing works mantra."[7] Finally, Lipsey and Cullen's (2007) review of the research on correctional interventions determined that every meta-analysis comparing offenders who received rehabilitation treatment with those who did not found lower recidivism for those who received treatment.[8] Most of the analyses found average recidivism reduction effects in the 20% range. Lipsey and Cullen (2007) concluded that "the preponderance of research evidence, therefore, supports the general conclusion that rehabilitation treatment is capable of reducing the reoffense rates of convicted offenders and that it has greater capability for doing so than correctional sanctions."[9]

In short, the scientific evidence is unmistakably clear. A variety of programs, properly targeted and well-implemented, can reduce recidivism and enhance public safety. The remainder of this section identifies and describes what works toward reaching these goals.

Given the knowledge that has been built over the past 30 years, recidivism rates can be cut, provided the services delivered are needed by the offender and the program is well implemented. Research has demonstrated that several interventions are effective at reducing recidivism, even among serious, high-risk offenders.

Principles of Effective Intervention

One of the key findings of the past 30 years of research is that effective interventions share a common set of features. These common characteristics form what leading criminologists Don Andrews, Paul Gendreau and their colleagues call the "principles of effective intervention."[10] These principles are summarized below.

1) **Effective intervention is intensive and targets behavioral change.** Intensive treatment occupies 40% to 70% of the offender's time and is 3 to 9 months in duration. Behavioral programs focus on changing the cognitions and values that maintain anti-social behavior, and they emphasize positive reinforcement rather than the threat of punishment to strengthen pro-social behavior.

2) **To effectively reduce recidivism, behavioral programs must target multiple criminogenic needs of higher risk offenders.** This is what is known as the need principle. Criminogenic needs are dynamic risk factors that are related to subsequent offending, such as substance abuse, lack of education, and anti-social attitudes and beliefs. Dynamic risk factors can be changed through programming, whereas static risk factors, such as criminal history and age at first arrest, cannot.

   An important correlate of the need principle is the critical role of risk assessment. It is possible to predict the risk of recidivism of groups of offenders by using well-researched assessment tools that are capable of identifying a wide range of criminogenic needs. The use of a comprehensive, reliable and valid instrument such as the LSI (Level of Service Inventory) offers significant improvements and advantages over guessing about future risk. The LSI predicts recidivism but, perhaps more importantly, it also provides information pertaining to offender needs. Most offenders in Colorado are assessed using the LSI tool.

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3) Another important principle is that higher risk offenders are more likely to benefit from interventions than lower risk offenders. This is what's known as the risk principle. In practice, more intensive levels of treatment should be reserved for higher-risk offenders. In fact, using high levels of treatment with low-risk offenders is not only inefficient, it can actually do more harm than good.

In Ohio, for example, Lowenkamp and Latessa (2004) found that community-based residential programs were successful in reducing recidivism for high-risk offenders, but that recidivism actually increased with low-risk offenders. These increases in recidivism rates were substantial, and they led the authors to question the policy of admitting low-risk offenders into residential programs in Ohio as well as across the country.[11] And in New York, Wilson (2007) found that participants in a short-term, prison-based reentry program, Project Greenlight, fared significantly worse than offenders who did not participate in the program, both in terms of rearrest and parole revocations. In a report published by the National Institute of Justice, Wilson discussed the reasons why Greenlight did more harm than good.

"Although the developers of Project Greenlight drew elements from the literature on correctional interventions, there were some key failures - most notably, ignoring the treatment principles that form the foundation of effective programming. There is general agreement that interventions should be directed toward high-risk participants and that assessing risk and needs should be a part of any intervention protocol. Project Greenlight staff found, however, that the assessment tool was too cumbersome and time-consuming to administer and therefore dropped it. Another basic treatment principle is that interventions should target participants' specific needs. Project Greenlight was a broad-based intervention in which everyone in the group was exposed to the same program elements. Postrelease interviews indicated that some participants felt significant frustration and anger about being forced to attend drug education sessions when they had no history of substance use. It should also be noted that an emerging body of evidence suggests that the delivery of intensive services to low-risk individuals may be counterproductive."[12]

There must be a match between the treatment approach, staff characteristics and the learning style and personality of the offender. Programs must take into account and be responsive to the motivation, cognitive ability, age, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics of the offender.

4) Finally, a basic principal for successful treatment delivery is that responsivity should occur between

The Level of Service Inventory (LSI) is one of the most common classification tools used with adult offenders. The LSI is used in a variety of correctional contexts across the United States to guide decision-making. In Colorado, the LSI is used in probation, community corrections, prison, and parole to develop supervision and case management plans and to determine placement in correctional programs. In some states, the LSI is used to make institutional assignments and release from institutional custody decisions. It may be the most used instrument: In a 1999 study, researchers found that 14% of the agencies surveyed in a national study were using the LSI with another 6% planning on implementing it in the near future. The instrument is perhaps the most researched correctional risk/needs assessment and, from the first validation study in 1982, it has continued to show consistent predictive validity for a range of correctional outcomes.

Source: Andrews, Dowden and Gendreau (1999).

program staff, offenders and program settings.[13] This is the responsivity principle. In essence, there must be a match between the treatment approach, staff characteristics, and the learning style and personality of the offender. Programs must take into account and be responsive to the motivation, cognitive ability, age, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics of the offender.

Research has demonstrated that programs incorporating these principles are far more effective at reducing recidivism than those that do not. A meta-analysis conducted by Andrews and Bonta (2006), for example, found that programs that embodied the principles of effective intervention achieved a recidivism reduction of around 50%, while programs that departed from them had little or no impact on recidivism.[14]