

# **Building Effective Offender Outcomes**

**Reentry in the State of Connecticut:  
Partners in Progress  
February 24 - 26, 2009  
Richard Stroker**

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## **Introduction**

- During this session, I will talk about:
  - How a vision of offender success is shaping the work of institutional and community supervision agencies.
  - Innovative, collaborative, risk reduction approaches that are being tried in several jurisdictions.
  - The value of using “evidence-based practices” to achieve desired outcomes.

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.” - Michelangelo

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## **a. The “3 Truths” about Effective Offender Reentry**

1. Taking steps to promote offender success in the community is an important ingredient of enhancing public safety; creating a vision around promoting offender success can provide a clear focus for all supervision or risk reduction efforts.
  - Creating this vision – and identifying the steps required to move towards it – requires true leadership.
  - System components must operate in harmony towards a common goal. Gaps and barriers must be identified and overcome, resources must be linked, and priorities must be established in order for meaningful progress to occur.

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## **Three Truths, Continued**

2. Effective offender supervision and meaningful risk reduction efforts require the use of evidence-based strategies. Targeting the criminogenic needs of higher risk offenders with appropriate actions and interventions (especially with a behavior-modification approach) can significantly impact the likelihood of recidivism.
3. Promoting offender success is not simply a criminal justice matter – it must involve meaningful collaborations with many other organizations and individuals in order to yield the best possible results.

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## b. The National Landscape

- A significant number of adult offenders – over 650,000 – will be released from prisons to their communities this year.
- 95% of offenders currently in custody will be released to the community at some point in the future.
- Based on current trends, about two-thirds of released offenders will be rearrested, and about one-half convicted of committing a new crime, within three years of their release.
- About one-third of offenders are rearrested within 6 months of release.

Source: BJS 2002, 2006; Study of 15 states representing 2/3 of prisoners released in U.S.

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## Recidivism: Released Prisoners



Source: BJS 2002; Study of 15 states; represents 2/3 of prisoners released in US

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## National Overview

- There are about 7 million adults currently under criminal justice supervision in the U.S.
  - \$60 billion spent annually (does not include prosecution costs, costs to victims, etc.) up from \$9 billion in 1980
- 7 million adults represents 1 in every 32 adults in U.S.
  - It was 1 in every 90 adults in 1980
- 2 million adults are in prison or jail (a 700% increase in the last 35 years). 1.4 million in prison; 750,000 in jail.
  - 1 in every 136 U.S. adults is currently in prison or jail
- Nearly 5 million adults are under community supervision.
  - 4.1 million adults are on probation (3 million in 1995)
  - 780,000 adults are on parole
    - Sources: BJA, 2002, 2006

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## Additional Information

- Revocations are the fastest growing category of prison admissions
  - Parole violators account for 35% of new prison admissions today, as compared to 17% in 1980.
  - About 41% of offenders on probation fail to successfully complete supervision.
- There are approximately 100,000 juveniles (ages 10-18) in secure private or public facilities.
- Between 50% and 70% of young offenders released from custody are rearrested within two years.

*(Sources: BJS, 2002, 2006; Travis & Lawrence, 2002; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Public Safety Performance Project, 2007; Austin, 2005).*

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## **c. Why is There So Much Failure by Offenders in the Community?**

- Risk assessment instruments help us appreciate some dynamic factors that impact risk. They include:
  - Substance abuse use (70% of incarcerated adults have substance abuse problems)
  - Lack of job skills/employment issues/limited education (40% of inmates leave prison do not have a high school degree or a GED; only 1/3 of inmates receive any vocational training)
  - Poor reasoning skills/criminal thinking patterns/poor attitude and decision making processes

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## **Other Considerations**

- Absence of pro-social support groups; the nature of the offender's social networks and associations
- Mental health/general health problems (1/3 of adults offenders and up to 70% of juvenile offenders have mental health problems)
- Absence of a stable residence
- 55% of adult inmates have children under 18, and having an incarcerated parent is a significant risk factor for delinquency.

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## **Are We Prepared to Address these Issues?**

- The question that must be faced is: how well prepared are we to address these issues?
- The old adage “if you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten” is important to remember. If we want offender failure statistics to change, we must be prepared to do some things in different ways.

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## **What about Public Sentiment?**

- By almost an 8 to 1 margin, the U.S. voting public is in favor of rehabilitative services for prisoners as opposed to a punishment-only system, and a majority favored services both during incarceration and after release from prison.
- By strong majorities, U.S. voters believe that a lack of life skills, the experience of being in prison, and barriers to reentry are major factors in the re-arrest of prisoners after release.
- Eighty-two percent of respondents felt that a lack of job training was a very significant barrier to released prisoners avoiding future crime.
- Similarly, respondents felt that services such as drug treatment, mental health services, family support, mentoring, and housing assistance should be offered to prisoners.

Source: National Surveys, Krisberg & Marchionna, 2006  
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## **Focus of Effective Offender Supervision/Risk Reduction Efforts**

### **FROM**

- **Custody/monitoring**
- **Silos**
- **Agency isolation**
- **Unproven methods**
- **Measuring inputs**

- **Offender failure**

### **TO**

- **Behavior change**
- **Coherent process**
- **Collaboration**
- **Using what works**
- **Measuring outcomes**

- **Offender success and public safety**

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## **I. Effective Offender Reentry What are We Learning? The Importance of Vision**

- From the various national initiatives, many jurisdictions have found that:
  - A clear “vision” for, and commitment to, offender reentry and supervision work must be established
  - An appropriate process must be developed to help organizations work effectively on offender risk reduction issues
  - Leadership is required from many individuals in order to impact offender recidivism

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## **a. The Need for a Clear “Vision”**

- We know that if offenders behaved lawfully and properly in their communities that everyone would benefit. Fewer crimes means fewer victims. Fewer community failures means safer communities.
- If we could impact the behaviors of offenders in ways that encourage them to act more lawfully and properly, then we would help decrease their risk of failure and promote greater public safety.

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### **KEY CONCEPT #1**

#### **Promoting Offender Success Can Be a Unifying Vision**

- When we engage in specific methods that are calculated to decrease the likelihood of an offender failing in the community or causing future harm, then we are attempting to promote the success of that offender – and through his or her success we improve the safety of our communities and institutions.
- While the offender’s success may benefit him or her, we largely seek this outcome in order to impact the greater or broader public good.
- Promoting offender success as a means of enhancing public safety is the key “vision” that has united collaborative work groups in a great many states.

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## Imagine This

- Imagine offenders who have been released from custody working at meaningful jobs, going to school, paying taxes, supporting dependents, not breaking the law or victimizing citizens. Imagine offenders becoming assets to their communities, mentors to other offenders, and positive influences on their children.
- Is it possible for us to impact the behavior of offenders so that they are more likely to succeed?

“You cannot depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.” - *Mark Twain*

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## b. Moving in the Direction of the Vision

- 8 key leadership actions that aid in moving forward with successful reentry and supervision efforts are:
  - Developing and announcing the vision – and consistently explaining the need for this new direction – to everyone impacted
  - Involving the right partners in the discussion
  - A clear structure for moving forward (developing teams; giving clear assignments; integration and organization of efforts)

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## **Moving in the Direction of the Vision**

- Encouraging comprehensive system analysis – to determine what is being done, what is working, where there are gaps or needs, etc.
- Prioritizing gaps or system needs
- Taking action to modify approaches, policies, or pursue resources where necessary
- Judicial support
- Involving key community members and groups in the effort to gain their input and support

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## **c. Moving in the Direction of their Vision**

GA:

- Created an inter-agency steering committee and an inter-agency policy committee
- Implemented a comprehensive risk/needs assessment tool; expanded transitional housing bed spaces; multi-agency teams developed community housing solutions for offenders; developed methods to share automated information across agency lines; created new partnerships with community and faith-based organizations

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## **Moving in the Direction of their Vision**

**MI:**

- Created an expansive inter-agency policy group that developed a vision statement and strategies
- Coordinated services for returning offenders through the Michigan Works! project; established local multi-agency, community service reentry teams; developed a criminogenic assessment tool; created new community supervision strategies; developed a unified case plan

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## **Moving in the Direction of their Vision**

**MO:**

- Created a dynamic transition accountability plan that stays with the offender after release to the community; modified approaches and programming for offenders to address criminogenic factors; new in-reach programs (e.g., community workforce development staff meet with offender before release).
- Developed key partnerships to address critical issues (e.g., mental health – 75% of offenders with serious mental health issues currently return to prison within 5 years). Mental Health and Substance Abuse agencies now working in concert with correctional agencies.

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## **Moving in the Direction of their Vision**

KS:

- Modified institutional and community supervision practices; created county reentry teams to develop specific approaches for promoting greater success by returning offenders. Assisted offenders to access community services; helped offenders to find employment, gain necessary documents, etc.
- Use of one risk/needs assessment instrument by various entities; coordination in case planning across agency lines; created ambitious goals – and achieving them.

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## **Important Actions in Other States**

- IN: Developed “in-reach” programs to assist offenders with reentry in the community
- NY: Developed new risk/needs assessment tools; created a dedicated reentry office within DOC; created local reentry teams
- OR: Governor’s Reentry Council established; developed “balanced scorecard;” created working teams to focus on critical issues
- RI: Focused on gender responsive approaches; developed new discharge planning process

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## **d. Some Positive Early Results**

- Michigan – significant reduction in returns to prison (approx. 26%) in 2007 for offenders who participate in particular reentry efforts, compared to a 1998 baseline.
- Missouri – offenders who go through transitional housing units have lower failure rates (for both technical violations and new crimes) after 6 months (from 23% to 15%) and 12 months.
- Georgia – focusing supervision on specific criminogenic factors has impacted successful completion of parole rates – up to 76% in 2008.
- Oregon – reports decreasing rates of revocation and absconding during first 6 months after release.

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## **Results in Kansas**

- In KS, improved reentry and risk reduction efforts have generated a significant reduction in parole failure rates (over 40% reduction in number of parolees revoked).
- At the same time, KS has seen a significant decrease in the commission of new crimes (over 40%) and a decrease in the number of absconders in its parole population (over 30%).

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## **The Importance of Leadership**

- Clearly, jurisdictions that are seeing significant changes in their recidivism rates are employing new ways of doing business.
- Making these changes – both within and across agency lines – requires commitment to a new vision (promoting offender success to enhance community safety) and the skills of numerous leaders within each jurisdiction to translate this vision in to new ways of doing work.

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## **II. What are We Learning? Focus on “What Works”**

- Over time, organizations change their approaches, their practices, and their methods. The question is not whether things will ever change – the questions are who will be initiating change, and what will be driving the changes that will occur.
- “Corrections is, among other things, a business. Like any other business we must embrace and employ new research, new knowledge, and new and better ways of performing.”

- Secretary Roger Werholz, Kansas DOC

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## **a. Two Features of Evidence-Based Practices**

- Using evidence-based practices requires us to examine both our philosophy and our practice.
- If we are clear about our objectives (e.g., risk reduction, public safety) the questions become:
  - Are we interested in using scientific information and research to inform our work?
  - Is there significant evidence to suggest that specific practices can help us to be more successful in accomplishing our risk reduction objectives?

“You can judge your age by the pain you feel when you come in contact with a new idea.”

- Pearl S. Buck

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## **Evidence of What?**

- In the criminal justice field, researchers have focused on practices or approaches that have an impact on recidivism.
- The questions they have explored involve programs, efforts, or approaches that appear to impact – one way or another – offender success or failure in the community.

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## **KEY CONCEPT #2:**

### **Effective risk reduction strategies require the use of evidence-based approaches**

- Evidence-based practices have two components:
  - First, they allow agencies the opportunity to use objective, scientific information as a foundation for working towards their goals and objectives.
  - Secondly, in the risk reduction area, it means using reliable information to inform the direction, content, and approach used in offender management activities.

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## **National Institute of Corrections/ Crime and Justice Institute Findings**

NIC and CJI identified the following “8 principles of effective interventions:”

- Assessing criminogenic risk/needs
- Targeting interventions using risk, need, responsivity, and dosage considerations
- Enhancing intrinsic motivation
- Skill train with directed practice (cognitive behavioral methods)
- Increase positive reinforcement
- Engage ongoing support in natural communities
- Measure relevant processes/practices
- Provide measurement feedback

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## Following these Principles

- Use actuarial and dynamic risk/needs tools to identify:
  - Those in need of the highest level of intervention
  - Factors which may likely contribute to continuing criminal behavior (which should be the focus of interventions)
- Focus conditions, referrals, and supervision efforts on criminogenic needs (which can impact the likelihood of continued criminal behavior) such as:

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## Criminogenic Needs

- Anti-social attitudes, values and beliefs (criminal thinking)
- Pro-criminal associates and isolation from pro-social associations
- Temperament and behavior characteristics (impulsivity, poor self-regulation, etc.)
- Weak problem solving and social skills
- History of anti-social behavior
- Negative family factors (neglect, abuse)
- Lack of education and education skills
- Substance abuse

Gendreau and Andrews, 1990

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## Targeting

- Target the criminogenic needs of moderate to high risk offenders for interventions (**who**);
- Use limited resources on their criminogenic need areas (**what**);
- Programs that have cognitive-behavioral components appear to achieve better results with offenders (**how**).
- Programs should be responsive to issues such as learning ability, motivation, culture, and gender (**how**).

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## Enhance Intrinsic Motivation

- Engage the offender in an appropriate discussion of goals and case management objectives
- Build on strengths of the offender
- Use motivational interviewing to identify issues, engage in problem solving approach to offender management
- Role model desired behavior (Oregon uses the 3Rs towards this end – role model, reinforce, redirect)

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## Interactions with Offenders

- Core supervision practices that can influence behavior change include:
  - Appropriate use of authority
  - Advocacy, brokering for resources
  - Structured skill-building, problem-solving
  - Effective reinforcement, punishment
  - Consistent, pro-social modeling

From Andrews and Bonta, 2007; Dowden and Andrews, 2004

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## Increase Positive Reinforcement

- The most effective behavior modification results occur when a 4:1 ratio of positive to negative reinforcement is used.
- This represents a significant change in how criminal justice agencies have traditionally operated – and may raise a variety of organizational culture issues.
  - “Any fact facing us is not as important as our attitude towards it, for that determines our success or failure.”
    - Norman Vincent Peale

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## Interacting with Offenders

- Does the nature of the interaction that the offender has with staff make a difference?
- In studying factors associated with behavior change, it appears that changes are driven by:
  - Extra therapeutic factors (e.g., self) = 40%
  - Rapport with staff = 30%
  - Treatment technique = 15%
  - Self-improvement = 15%

Source: Lambert and Bailey, 2002

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## Engage On-Going Support in Natural Communities

- Studies have consistently demonstrated that offenders who maintain positive pro-social supports are more likely to be successful in the community.
  - Maintaining strong family ties while incarcerated reduced likelihood of recidivism
  - Reduced substance abuse use was the result of pressure, motivation, and encouragement from family members
  - Maintaining family relationships are key for the success of female offenders

Sources: Harrison, 1998, 1991; Holt and Miller, 1972; La Bodega de la Familia; Dowden and Andrews, 1999

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## **Measure Results and Modify Practices based on what we see**

- Measuring relevant processes and providing measurement feedback helps determine which approaches, programs, methods or actions are producing the desired results.
- For instance, in Oregon, county supervision agencies are collecting and measuring various types of offender employment data to identify of progress or issues within the county.

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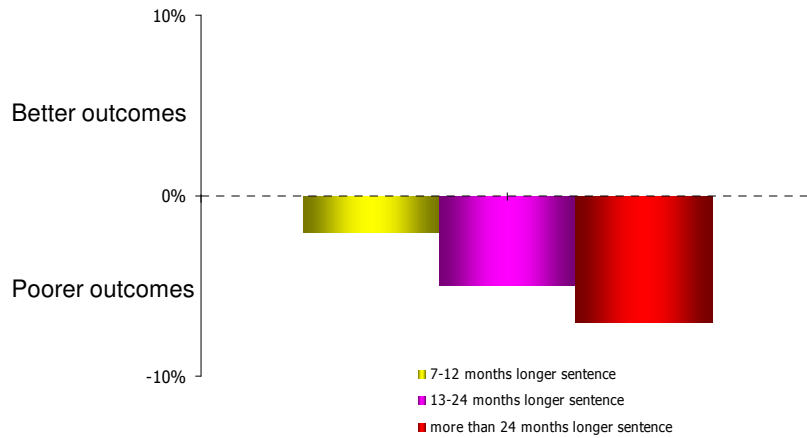
## **b. What is Not Working?**

- For which interventions and strategies is the evidence less than favorable?
- Recent studies have found that:
  - For most offenders, prisons do not show a deterrent effect
  - Longer prison sentences are not associated with reduced recidivism
  - Longer sentences are associated with a 3% rise in recidivism

(Gendreau, et al., 1999)

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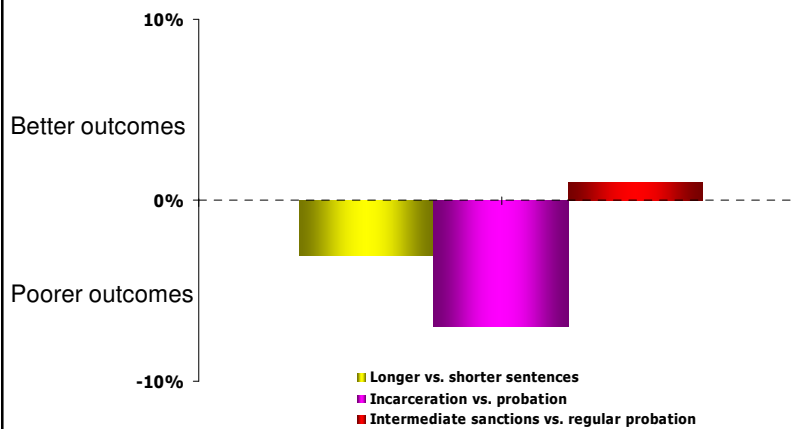
## Impact of Sentence Length on Recidivism



(Smith, Goggin, & Gendreau, 2002)

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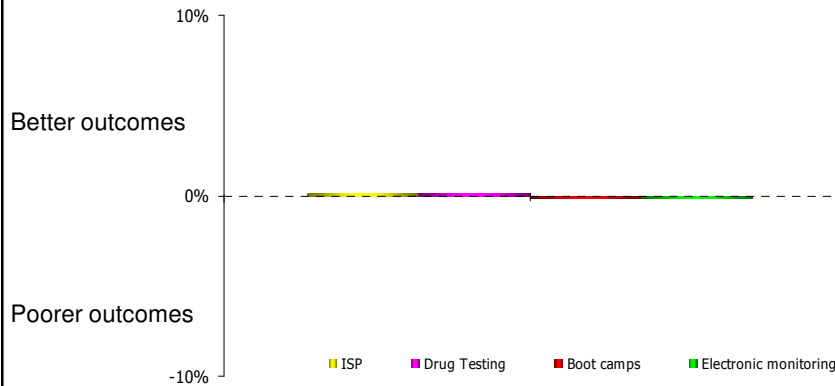
## Impact of Punishment-Driven Strategies on Recidivism: Adults



Smith, Goggin, & Gendreau, 2002)

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## Impact of Intermediate Sanctions on Recidivism: Adults



(Aos et al., 2001, 2006; Gendreau et al., 2000)

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## Intensive Supervision?

- Intensive supervision programs – with a surveillance oriented approach – show no impact on reducing recidivism.
- Intermediate sanctions – such as electronic monitoring and drug testing – without a treatment component show no impact on reducing recidivism.
- They just take more money and resources to operate.
  - Aos, et al., WSIPP, (2006); Smith, Goggin, Gendreau (2002)

“Bad is never good until something worse happens.”  
Danish proverb

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## **Punishment and Deterrence-Driven Strategies**

- Research demonstrates that punishment and deterrence-driven approaches used in isolation have:
  - Negligible impact;
  - No impact; or
  - Negative impact

(see Aos et al., 2006; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; MacKenzie, 1998, 2006; Petersilia & Turner, 1993)

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## **c. What Does Work?**

- When offender supervision efforts are paired with pro-social or rehabilitation-oriented interventions (e.g., treatment, education)
  - Recidivism rates are reduced significantly
  - Re-arrests are as much as 20% lower

(see Aos et al., 2006; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; MacKenzie, 1998; Petersilia & Turner, 1993)

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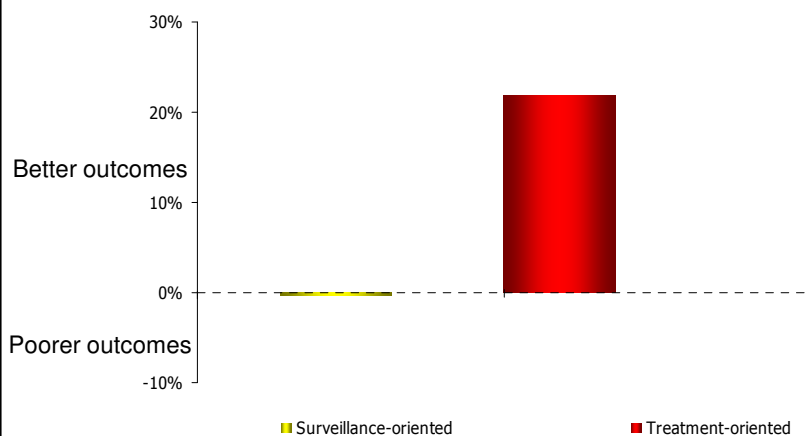
## Examples of Adult Programming and Impacts on Recidivism

- Community-based cognitive-behavioral sex offender treatment -32%
- Prison-based cognitive-behavioral sex offender treatment -14.9%
- Prison-based vocational education -12.6%
- Community-based drug treatment -12.4%
- Prison-based cognitive-behavioral programs (general and specific) -8.2%

■ Adapted from Aos, Miller and Drake, 2006

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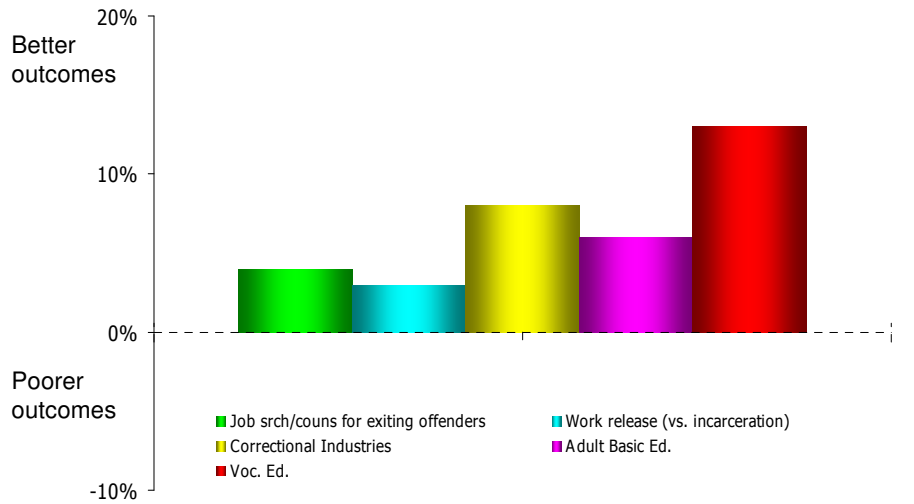
## Intervention Effects by Supervision Approach



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(Aos et al., 2006)

## Intervention Effects for Adult Offenders: Education/Vocational Programs and Services



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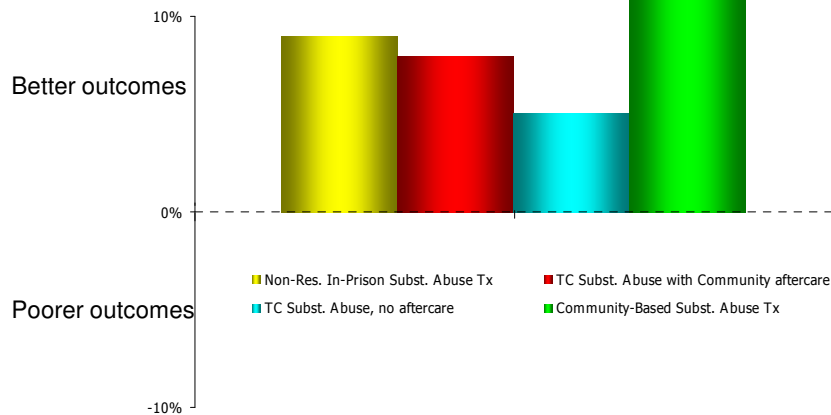
(Aos et al., 2001, 2006)

## Results from a Few States

- Studies in MO have indicated that the inability to acquire lawful work is the factor most related to failure while under community supervision. Offenders who left prison with less than a GED fail at higher rates (55%) than those with a GED (40%).
- In GA, studies have indicated that offenders who attended vocational education programming were 17% less likely to return to prison after release than similarly situated offenders who did not participate in such programming.
  - Sources: MO DOC; GA DOC

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## Intervention Effects for Adult Offenders: Substance Abuse Treatment



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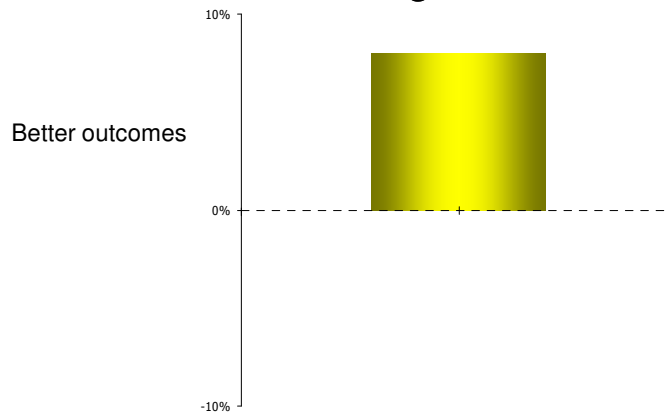
(Aos et al., 2001, 2006)

## Transitional Housing

- In GA, offenders who are placed in transitional housing units prior to release are much more likely to successfully complete supervision (more than 20%).
- When we don't transition offenders to lower classification levels, we can see the opposite result. In KS, offenders who were released directly from segregation units had a return to prison rate of 80% (compared to 56% for all offenders).

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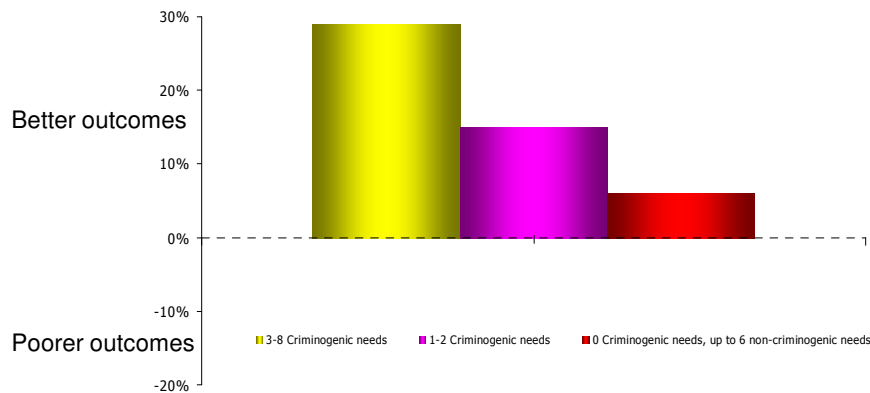
## Intervention Effects for Adult Offenders: Cognitive Skills/Cognitive-Behavioral Programs



(Aos et al., 2001, 2006)

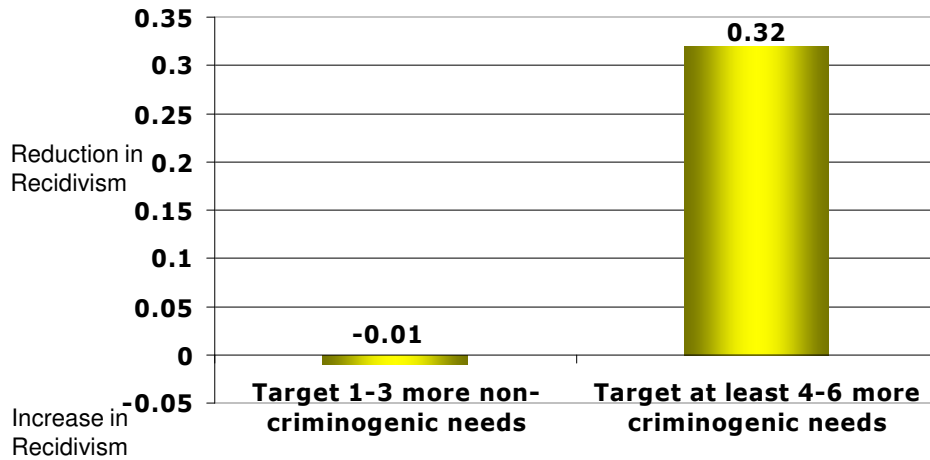
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## Prison Misconduct Reductions as a Function of Targeting Multiple Criminogenic Needs



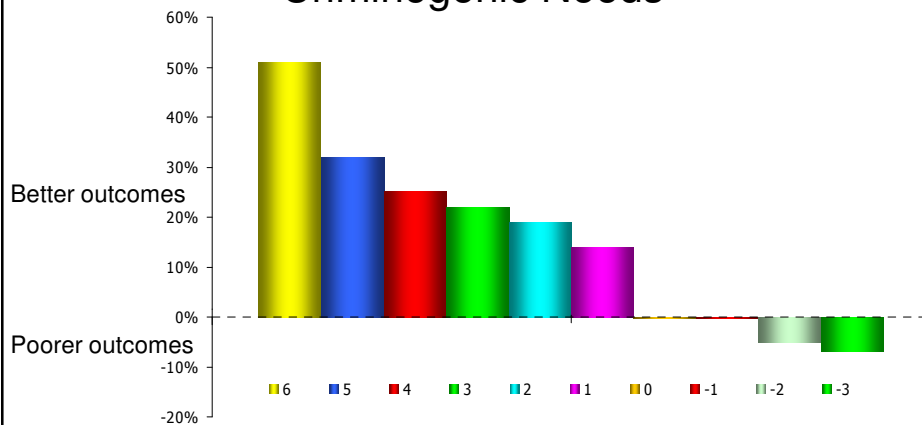
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## Targeting Criminogenic Needs: Results from Meta-Analyses



(Gendreau, French, & Taylor, 2002)  
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## Recidivism Reductions as a Function of Targeting Multiple Criminogenic vs. Non-Criminogenic Needs\*



(Andrews, Dowden, & Gendreau, 1999; Dowden, 1998)

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## Impact of Effective Interventions: Adults

Well-designed and well-delivered programs can reduce recidivism by as much as 30% for adult offenders.

(see, e.g., Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005; Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Andrews et al., 1990; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Gendreau, Smith, & Goggin, 2001)

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## Working Towards Success

- In light of the above, it appears that you can strive to improve public safety by taking steps that will help encourage more successful offender outcomes.
- The question then becomes, do your systems and actions help you to accomplish this overall objective?

“If the wind will not serve, take to the oars.”

Sophocles

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### **III. What are We Learning? The Need to Make Sense of Our Systems and Collaborate**

- In order to positively impact some of the issues associated with offender success or failure, we have to take a hard look at how we are using our time and energies.
  - First, are we identifying the factors that we think might contribute to offender success or failure?
  - Next, are we constructively addressing these factors during incarceration and in the community through appropriate interventions?
  - Third, do our actions, attitudes, methods, and systems work together to encourage or discourage more offender success?

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#### **a. Some Thoughts About Systems**

- A system is something that may have numerous components, but these parts work in harmony to accomplish some desired end result.
- If our desired end result (encouraging offender success to promote greater public safety) is clear, then we must analyze our system parts to see if they operate in harmony to help achieve this outcome.

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## Let's Consider the System's Parts

- Our system might contain some of the following:
  - It may start at an institution/jail where an offender's risk and criminogenic needs could be identified
  - We develop programs/activities to address some of these needs – particularly for higher risk offenders
  - We develop transitional preparation programming – with “in reach” from the community
  - We share critical information about the offender across organizations/agencies and build on each other's work
  - We establish conditions related to their risk and needs
  - Supervision in the community is focused on higher risk cases and their specific criminogenic needs
  - We coordinate institutional and community programming

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## b. Working Together

- It is critical that all of the components of our system work together to accomplish the desired results. Towards this end, you could:
  - Identify critical partners for offender reentry
  - Develop means for sharing information across agency/office/divisional lines
  - Use compatible approaches in programming
  - Build on each other's work
  - Have a common focus for all efforts

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## **Collaborative Work in Some States**

- In New York, Michigan, Indiana, Rhode Island, Georgia, Missouri and Kansas, various combinations of the potential partners listed previously have been included on the “top tier” (steering committees), “second tier” (policy teams) and “third tier” (local reentry teams).
- Involving these partners helps to bring the best information, perspectives, and solutions to offender supervision problems.

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## **Some Local Team Examples**

- In Kansas, local reentry team participants may include community corrections directors, county commissioners, judges, representatives from local branches of various state agencies, local treatment, employment and service providers, and several others.
- In New York, local teams members include representatives from corrections, community supervision, private sector treatment and service providers, charitable organizations, law enforcement, employment organizations, and others.

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### **KEY CONCEPT #3: Effective Offender Management Requires Collaboration with Others**

- Many organizations can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of community supervision. Working in isolation, well-meaning organizations can only accomplish so much.
- Working together, more meaningful, comprehensive and seamless approaches to promoting offender success and enhancing public safety can be implemented.

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### **Working in Silos**

- Organizations tend to have well defined goals and activities that are viewed exclusively within their own internal authorization/context.
- Working in these silos, organizations interact with an individual offender (and his/her family), gather and enter data, and engage in specific actions.
- Imagine the power associated with building upon each other's work – supporting and working in a complementary fashion. Imagine the duplications and unnecessary work that could be eliminated if information/efforts were shared.

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## **The Importance of a Common Focus**

- During the 1960s, at the height of the “space race,” NASA was intent on trying to carry out President Kennedy’s statement that we would land a man on the moon by the end of the decade.
- During a visit, a reporter asked a janitor what his job was. While sweeping the floor, he indicated that his job was to help land a man on the moon. That’s a clear focus.

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## **What if We Tried to Generate Failure?**

- If you tried to invent a community corrections system that did not encourage offender success – one that even encouraged failure, what would it look like?
- Would it
  - Fail to share information across entities/offices
  - Fail to identify and address criminogenic risk/needs
  - Engage in little or no transitional planning
  - Have many segments working in isolation
  - Impose numerous and unrealistic supervision conditions
  - Offer higher risk inmates little assistance in overcoming their problems
  - Manage all offenders the same and wait for failure?

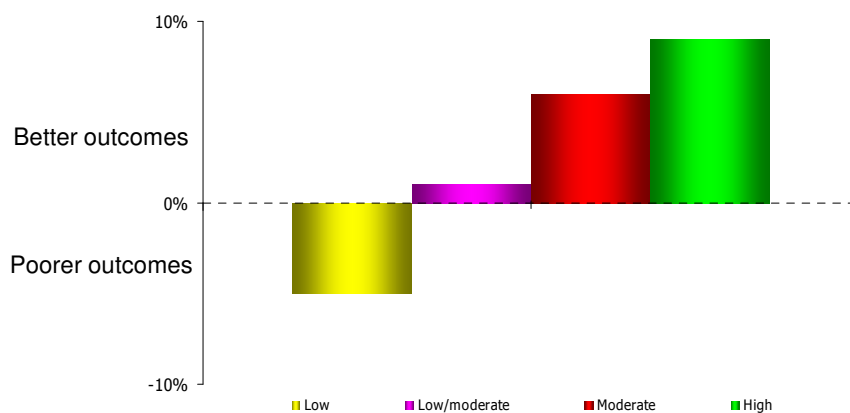
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## c. The Use of Conditions

- Some jurisdictions place a significant number of probation/release conditions on the offender - electronic monitoring, in-patient treatment programs, day reporting requirements, pay restitution, report each week, etc. What are we trying to accomplish with each condition? Can they all be met at the same time? Are we imposing these conditions for the right reasons and on the right offenders?
- The result of these numerous and sometimes conflicting requirements can often create unnecessary supervision failures.

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### Halfway Houses to Promote Reentry: Efficacy as a Function of Offender Risk



Approx. 3,500 offenders placed in halfway houses, compared to 3,500 not placed in a halfway house

Center for Effective Public Policy © 2009 (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005)

## **d. Link Your Efforts, Prioritize Your Resources, and Spend Time Wisely**

- In order for components to work in harmony, they must work towards the same end.
  
- When we:
  - Do not properly assess critical areas and criminogenic needs
  - Do not create appropriate case plans
  - Fail to prioritize our program slots for higher risk offenders
  - Do not prepare offenders for release
  - Place too many conditions on released offenders
  - Spend too much time on lower risk offenders...

...Then we're not operating like a good system

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## **Prioritizing Resources**

- It is clear that some offenders pose a greater likelihood of failure, or pose greater risk, than others. Assessment tools help us to identify offenders who pose greater risk, and we can devote our time and energies managing these offenders and trying to reduce their likelihood of failure.
- But there is only so much staff time, and so much programming availability. The question becomes, how do we prioritize what we have, and how do we eliminate actions or processes that are not helping us to best achieve our goals?

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## What is “Important”

- Management author Steven Covey talks about work activities being driven by two factors: what is urgent and what is important.
  - “If we don’t have a clear idea of what is important, we are easily diverted into responding to the urgent.”  
Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
- Many people become involved in playing the “whack a mole” game – spending all day on “urgent” matters but feeling that they make little progress.

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## Low Risk Offenders

- Research suggests that placing low risk offenders in programs – even programs that appear appropriate to address some of their needs – can result in an increase in their failure. This information should aid us with our prioritization of program placements, the imposition of conditions, and our supervision activities.
- When we impose numerous conditions on a low risk offender, watch the person closely, and catch them violating a condition, how much are we really improving public safety?

Source, MacKenzie, 2006

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## **High Risk Offenders**

- When we focus our time and energies on reducing the risks and likelihood of failure posed by higher risk offenders, then we are taking the most appropriate steps to enhance public safety.
- Our supervision time, conditions, and attention should be devoted to impacting higher risk offenders in ways that make them less likely to commit infractions or violations.

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## **A System for Managing Offenders and Focusing on the Right Issues**

- If your system is focused on accomplishing certain end results, and staff time is prioritized or made available so that more work can be done in the most important areas, then your system will be improved.
- Similarly, your system will benefit by efforts to eliminate communication barriers, link the efforts of staff who are dealing with a common offender, and reaching out to other partners to help you strengthen your approach or possibilities.

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## **V. Offender Supervision Strategies - the Practical Implications of Evidence-Based Practices**

- When the offender is placed under community supervision we want the offender to stop committing crimes and to abide by various rules. If we impose many conditions, and watch the offender closely enough, we will probably detect some violations. Catching offenders while they are failing is not very difficult.
- The harder work is to consider what we can do to help more offenders engage in appropriate behaviors – and succeed – in the community.

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### **a. Waiting for Failure?**

- In many situations, state and local personnel may be in a very reactive posture – waiting and responding to failure by the offender.
- We have become so good at responding to community supervision failure that, nationally, revocations are the fastest growing category of prison admissions (18% in 1980, up to 34% today).
- Responding to failure can take up a significant part of our front line staff's time - filling out forms, participating in hearings, etc. Perhaps this time could be used more productively.

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## Applying the EBP Information

- If holding people accountable is our primary objective, then having contact to ensure compliance has value.
- But holding people accountable, by itself, appears to have little relationship to reducing the likelihood of failure or recidivism. To reduce recidivism, you must focus more on the nature, rather than the number, of contacts.

Bonta, et al., 2008

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## High Risks with High Needs

- Many higher risk offenders have significant issues concerning alcohol or drug use, “criminal” thinking patterns, employment, mental or physical health, vocational training, education, developing appropriate associations, and other matters.
- How are we working on these issues during and after the offender’s incarceration? Are we organized and deployed to work on these types of issues? How strong is our communication between institutional and community efforts? If we had the time, what could we be doing to attend to these issues?

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## **Examples from Some States**

- The use of solid assessment tools – to identify criminogenic factors – is a critical starting point.
- Using this information, local teams in NY and MI have developed specific methods for placing higher risk offenders in particular community programs, and working together to resolve problems of access or participation.
- These local teams involve the supervision agent, representatives from various private providers, and local staff from specific state agencies.

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## **Utilize Proactive Approaches**

- As an alternative to the reactive offender management approach, we can invest more time trying to prevent offender failure. As police organizations discovered with “community policing,” it is always better to prevent a crime or violation than to respond to it after the fact.
- Prevention can be our watchword. Preventing crimes, failure, violations, or infractions by offenders will help us to achieve our goal of enhancing public safety, and can help us to have safer communities and safer working environments.
- Prevention is more likely to occur when we involve a variety of partners on the local level.

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## **Surveillance-Oriented vs. Success Oriented Supervision**

- **Surveillance oriented**
  - Enforce conditions
  - Monitor compliance
  - Contacts driven by policy/standards
  - Emphasis on sanctions for non-compliance
  - Referrals to programs are secondary
  - Staff react after problems arise
- **Success-Driven**
  - Officers: agents of change
  - Monitoring to assess progress, goal attainment
  - Contacts are driven by problem solving focus
  - Reinforce positive change, sanction if warranted
  - Advocacy and brokerage of services
  - Needs are anticipated; proactive interventions

Adapted from Fulton, et al., 1994;  
Taxman et al., 2006

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## **Proactive Community Supervision in Maryland**

- Agency guidelines and expectations were clarified – focusing on offender success
- Probation/parole officers were trained in motivational interviewing skills
- Supervisors and managers coached line staff, observed interactions
- Case plans were designed to include internal and external measures
- Community partnerships were developed
- Performance measures were modified

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## **b. The Case Plan**

- A significant amount of information is collected from offenders every time they enter a prison, jail or begin supervision. A risk/needs assessment tool helps identify issues that may be related to the likelihood of future criminal activity, as well as “strengths” that may assist the offender to stay out of trouble.
- The case plan can target important criminogenic areas.
- Important information contained in the case plan must be shared with various organizations/entities in order to maximize its use.

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## **A Roadmap for Success**

- Many offenders have had very little success at any lawful activity. Many offenders being released have a poor or no clear idea of how they will succeed.
- Offenders need a roadmap – they need to see progress – they need to realize results. This roadmap can provide a focus for staff and efforts and offender interventions, and should help lead the offender to the successful completion of supervision.

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## Using a Single Case Plan

- Many organizations, divisions, and individuals come into contact with one offender. They often create their “own” case plan. This plan may be developed and carried out without much awareness of or regard for the observations, interventions, assessments, or work done by other organizations with the same offender.
- A single case plan, that moves with the offender from organization to organization, and is updated over time helps to create a unified approach to addressing the criminogenic issues that may be present in one case. (Example: GA)

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### c. What Types of “Goals” are Set in the Case Plan?

- Pay fines and restitution
- Get a job
- Get a GED
- Stop drinking/using illegal drugs
- Complete cognitive restructuring/life skill courses
- Complete community service work
- Establish a new residence
- Do not associate with current/former offenders
- Develop a better attitude
- Do not commit disciplinary infractions/violations

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## **The Value of Using “Smart” Goals**

- In order for a person to work towards a goal, he or she must believe that the goal is appropriate and achievable. Smaller, short-term goals may be the best way to help a person move towards larger goals.
- Smart goals = small, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely goals.
- Do our existing conditions overwhelm the average offender?

Marilyn Van Dieten, Ph.D.  
Orbis Partners Inc.

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### **d. Important Elements of Staff-Offender Interactions: Influencing Change**

- Core correctional practices that can influence behavior change include:
  - Appropriate use of authority
  - Advocacy, brokerage for resources
  - Structured skill-building, problem-solving
  - Effective reinforcement, punishment
  - Consistent, pro-social modeling

From Andrews and Bonta, 2007; Dowden and Andrews, 2004

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## **Carrots and Sticks**

- So how do we influence offenders to behave properly, to get into the mainstream of success? One way is to review and perhaps modify our system of rewards and punishments.
- While most correctional systems invest great time and energy responding to the consequences of misbehavior, they often do not give an equal amount of time to considering how positive offender behavior can be encouraged. In your experience, do incentives, or disincentives, seem to have the most impact on the future behavior of individuals?

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## **Positive Reinforcement**

- Research indicates that people are four times more likely to modify their future actions in response to positive, as opposed to negative, reinforcement.
- Which would have more impact on your future behavior – someone telling you that they wish all employees were as good as you and that you are a role model for others, or that you better keep up your good work or you will be disciplined?

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## **The Lesson of Incentives**

- If we want to modify offender behavior, then we should not limit ourselves to the consequences of failure. We should focus on methods of encouraging positive actions.
- What incentives, rewards, or benefits do we offer? Do offenders see the connection between their behavior and these outcomes? What else could we do? This clearly has implications for our classification systems, our programs, privileges, and supervision strategies.

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## **Who Else Can Help Encourage Positive Offender Behavior?**

- Many offenders know someone who can have great influence over their actions. A parent, spouse, friend, etc., can be a meaningful ally in helping to generate positive behaviors if they understand your system and encourage positive actions.
- Could some of these individuals be informed or involved in ways that would help achieve your goals?

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## **How Should We Be Interacting?**

- Motivational interviewing is a way of listening to and interacting with offenders. One primary goal is to help the offender identify his/her own goals, and to understand the dissonance between certain actions and these goals.
- Applying behavioral-focused approaches during offender interactions can encourage appropriate actions and the repetition of positive steps, and help to discourage less helpful thoughts or behaviors.

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## **Motivational Interviewing**

- Research in the substance abuse and mental health fields has helped to reveal the value of a particular interviewing technique – called motivational interviewing – in gaining valuable information from the client.
- This technique involves the use of open ended questions, a firm but fair environment, the modeling of pro-social behavior, and the demonstration of some “empathy” or understanding of the situation of the person being interviewed.

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## Does the Supervision Approach Matter?

- Early results from MD indicate significantly lower recidivism rates for offenders managed using a PCS approach when compared to a matched sample of offenders supervised in a more traditional manner.
- Results in KS, MI, GA and other states appear to support the value of this new approach.
  
- Source: Taxman, et al., 2006

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## Personal Power

- We often underestimate the impact that one individual can have on another. Many of you have the opportunity in your work to set an appropriate tone for interactions with offenders.
- If we accept the goal of trying to encourage more offender success in order to promote public safety, then personal interactions with the offender can be critical to its achievement - an important weapon in your arsenal.
  
- "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."  
- *Mahatma Gandhi*

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## Conclusions

- In going forward in this area, it is important to stay focused on the overall goal – promoting public safety by encouraging offender success.
- Systems, methods, policies, strategies and actions that are not consistent with this goal will have to be examined and modified. The key is developing harmony between your system goals and your actions.
- Working collaboratively with various partners can extend your ability to be successful in reaching your public safety objectives.
- Using evidence-based approaches will help organizations develop sound approaches to their risk reduction efforts.

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## Changing your System for the Better

- By focusing your energies in a concerted and specific way, linking activities that promote your desired outcomes, and harnessing the abilities and efforts of your personnel, you will see changes in the way that work gets done and in the outcomes associated with particular offenders.
- It starts with good planning. As Ben Franklin said, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." But it must end with good action. And you have the chance to take action every day, for as Abraham Lincoln observed:  
"The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time."

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