



Providing offenders the opportunity to build literacy, academic, vocational, interpersonal, leisure time, cognitive and daily living skills will reduce their chances of re-offending.

Offender Programming: A Smart Investment for Society

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Nationally, the number of state and federal inmates has grown by more than 700 percent since 1970. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, at midpoint 2005, 1.5 million prisoners were under either federal or state jurisdiction and more than 800,000 offenders were either held or supervised by local jail authorities. Nine percent of these offenders were in electronic monitoring or other alternative programs. Since the 1980s, the national trend in criminal justice has moved toward more frequent use of prison sentences as a sanction and longer periods of incarceration, especially for mandatory minimum terms.

The female offender population continues to increase at a faster rate than that of male offenders. Women accounted for 7 percent of all inmates as of June 30, 2005, up from 6.1 percent on Dec. 31, 1995. Eventually, 93 percent of all inmates are released back to their communities. Nationwide, these numbers are getting the attention of politicians, policy-makers, practitioners and taxpayers alike. How offenders spend their time while incarcerated and how they are released and then supervised impacts public safety.

Increasingly, there is talk about not just being “tough” on crime, but being “smart” about crime. It is smart to prepare offenders to return to society as law-abiding citizens. If they do not, we all pay, either directly as victims or indirectly as taxpayers.

Professor Edward Latessa from the University of Cincinnati notes in his 2004 *Criminology and Public Policy* article, “The Challenge of Change:

Correctional Programs and Evidenced Based Practices,” that one of the problems with crime is that everyone is an expert. Once when Latessa was on a flight, an older woman seated next to him asked what he did for a living. After learning he was a criminologist, she spent the next several hours telling him how to solve the crime problem. As Latessa points out, “from the politician to the caseworker, everyone thinks they know how to deal with offenders and what we need to do to ‘straighten them out.’”

Any efforts to “straighten” offenders out, invites a myriad of policy-related debates about the use of incarceration, sentencing laws and practices, the impact of mandatory, minimum terms, and the lack of community-based drug treatment options in particular. These are all critical issues warranting future exploration. This issue of *Corrections Today* focuses on offender programming. By showcasing the depth of diversity, creativity and effectiveness of select initiatives throughout the field of corrections, readers will see that offender programming is a central part of these policy discussions.

In 1975, Robert Martinson published his meta-analysis of more than 200 separate studies of correctional treatment programs’ effectiveness in reducing recidivism. He concluded “nothing works.” Not surprisingly, funding for offender programs took a hit. Since then, thanks to the work of many academics, researchers and practitioners, we now know that some programs do work for some offenders under some circumstances. The National Institute of Corrections and ACA have played

critical roles in training correctional administrators and staff on the now widely recognized Principles of Effective Correctional Intervention.

We have learned that effective programs target offenders’ level of risk and needs. Risk is the probability that an offender will commit new crimes. We know the chance for offenders’ success improves by providing high-intensity programming to those at high risk for re-offending. We also know that providing high intensity treatment to low-risk offenders may increase their risk level by extensively exposing them to higher-risk offenders who may contaminate them with anti-social attitudes, thinking patterns, beliefs and behaviors.

An offender’s criminogenic needs are dynamic and may be impacted by targeted programming and treatment. Providing offenders the opportunity to build literacy, academic, vocational, interpersonal, leisure time, cognitive and daily living skills will reduce their chances of re-offending. On the whole, research has given us all a reason to be hopeful. Policy-makers can embrace societal contributions that result from better educated, substance abuse-free, employed ex-inmates. Taxpayers can celebrate the tangible cost savings resulting from reduced recidivism. Correctional officers, caseworkers and administrators can link supervised program participation to reduced idleness, fewer critical incidents and enhanced adjustment skills. When you finish reading this issue, leave it in a staff lunchroom or hand it to someone on a plane who asks where you work. ♦