

Substance Abuse Services and Issues in Community Offender Supervision

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The North Carolina Division of Community Corrections has undergone a decade of change in achieving its mission to "Protect society by applying appropriate control over the offender while coordinating community resources that enables those under our supervision the opportunity to change their behavior, support their family, pay restitution and make reparation to their victims, and to become productive law abiding citizens."

In addition to our many initiatives and partnerships that address the risks and meet the needs of an ever-changing offender population, we have reached deep within our profession to overhaul our own 65 year-old probation and parole system. The philosophy and focus of this Division has changed from being solely on the offender to a focus on the community, the victim, and the offender as well. In order to be successful at impacting positive change, we must provide the opportunity for change for the offender. Increased treatment resources, job skills training opportunities, and support groups are necessary components of the success model. We have shifted from a one-on-one focus between the probation officer and the offender to a team supervision approach including probation officers, treatment providers, law enforcement, families, and the community as a whole. A balance of control and treatment is a must for community corrections to be successful in reducing repeat or future offenses and addressing relapse.

The Division of Community Corrections is one of the major operating arms of the North Carolina Department of Correction and is charged with the responsibility of providing supervision within our community of offenders who are placed on supervised probation or unsupervised probation with community service by the courts or who receive post release supervision or parole. The offender population includes those convicted of

felonies, misdemeanors, and DWI offenses. Currently the Division supervises nearly 128,000 offenders across our state, which is a challenging responsibility. To put it into perspective, if all of the offenders were in one location, there would be only five cities and 20 counties in our state with a larger population.

During fiscal year 2007-2008, over 72,000 offenders were admitted to supervision with the Division. For those with felony offenses, over 37% had committed a drug-related offense. In the misdemeanor categories, 22% were DWI offenses and 15% were drug-related. In most other offense categories, substance abuse is often a behavioral issue for the offender. The North Carolina Department of Correction estimates indicate that over 60% of our offender population has some form of a substance abuse issue and need for services.

Currently the Division works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services through a memorandum of agreement following an Offender Management Model. Part of the model requires offenders to be sent to the local Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities (TASC) office for substance abuse assessments and placements. TASC provides a bridge between our criminal justice system agency and community-based treatment providers through coordination and oversight of services. TASC assesses and refers offenders to appropriate service providers and treatment while the Division's probation officers focus on supervision within the community and follow-up with the provider and TASC to determine progress within treatment. The Division is committed to the principles and practices of the Offender Management Model and has established standard operating procedures to support a better

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understanding of this process. The Offender Management Model has become the central theme of community corrections across the state.

Several more specialized areas also exist. Offenders sentenced within the intermediate grid of structured sentencing who, in theory, pose a higher risk, may be required to complete an intermediate sanction such as residential treatment, a day reporting center, or a drug treatment court program. All of these sanctions include strict supervision with treatment and have proven to be successful in reducing the risk of reoffending. There are only 21 day reporting centers^a and 19 drug treatment courts operating in the state, and there are a limited number of residential treatment beds available. There are 130 residential treatment beds available through the department-operated Drug Alcohol Recovery Treatment (DART) program, as well as an additional limited amount that are provided through a few private nonprofit programs.

The majority of treatment services for offenders are provided on an outpatient basis at the local level, including those received in a drug treatment court or day reporting center. The Division's Criminal Justice Partnership Program, which provides funding for the day reporting centers, also provides funding for local satellite substance abuse programs and resource centers, programs which provide a one stop location for the outpatient providers to reach the offender population. The partnership program is one of the leading providers of funding for treatment services for offenders, but it has only \$9 million in funds to reach this large and growing population.

With an ever-growing offender population, substance abuse services targeted to the offender population have been unable to meet the needs throughout the state; this has created a growing service gap. Particularly in many rural counties, the criminal justice partnership-funded programs are the only option to directly reach the offender population.

Offenders, because of their conviction and past behavior, have shown the need for help, yet they are often overlooked in the face of many competing priorities. Consequently, since its inception in 1995, the criminal justice partnership has not received the funding growth to keep up with the growth in the offender population or for the cost increases associated with services. Funding for services has remained static. On April 1, 2008 a report was provided to the legislature on the criminal justice partnership program as part of the legislative review for continued funding. The report provided detail on how the program was able to reduce the risk of re-offense by 62% for offenders who complete one of the partnership programs. The report included a promising assessment of what the Division's supervision combined with treatment can do to change offender behavior towards the positive.

In order to continue the progress illustrated by the partnership report, a greater focus on the combination of supervision and treatment for offenders will be necessary. While successful, all partnership programs combined reach less than 7,000 in the offender population each year. While not all offenders are in need of this type of intense supervision and treatment, we must strive to reach all offenders in need with the appropriate level of service in order to reduce risk and reoffending behaviors.

The Division of Community Corrections' hardworking, dedicated probation officers are a vital key to changing behavior, but many other components are necessary in order to be successful. The assessment of offenders' risk and needs is a top priority of the Division, a project that began in 2008. However, if the Division and its community partners are not provided the treatment resources and other wrap-around services necessary to address the risk and needs identified then our goal to reduce reoffending may prove to be doomed from the beginning. **NCMJ**

^a Reporting centers are restrictive, treatment-oriented facilities where substance abuse services, employment services, and educational services are provided on-site with strict requirements for offender attendance and accountability.