

**AN EVALUATION OF DELAWARE COUNTY
COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

BY

MICHAEL P. BROWN

JEROME MCKEAN

RAECHELLE HAMPTON

**DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND
CRIMINOLOGY, BALL STATE UNIVERSITY**

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This executive summary attempts to draw the readers' attention to the primary issues raised in the full report. It begins with a brief description of the "What Works" approach to offender monitoring and treatment. "What works" is not only the approach used in the state of Indiana, it is also the dominant approach to community-based corrections (community corrections, probation, and parole) in the United States. We then turn our attention to how we collected data for this evaluation and the limitations of the data we were able to obtain. Selected findings are discussed. And, following from these results, we offer a number of recommendations.

The "What Works" Principles

The Indiana Department of Correction takes a "What Works" approach to community corrections. The "What Works" principles are:

Organizational Culture: Such a culture has well defined goals, ethical principles and a history of efficiently responding to issues that have an impact on treatment facilities.

Program Implementation/Maintenance: Quality corrections programs are based on empirically defined needs, are consistent with the organization's values and are fiscally responsible and congruent with stakeholder values.

Management/Staff Characteristics: Corrections professionals are trained and experienced in the area of offender treatment programs that are supportive of rehabilitation.

Client Risk/Need Practices: Risk is assessed by psychometric instruments of proven predictive validity and consists of a wide range of dynamic risk factors or criminogenic needs and takes into account the responsiveness of offenders to different styles and modes of service. This type of instrument should be used for both initial and reassessment purposes.

Program Characteristics: Programs should target for change a wide variety of criminogenic needs (recidivism predictors) by using empirically valid behavioral/social learning/cognitive behavioral therapies that are directed at higher risk offenders.

Core Correctional Practice: Diverse therapeutic practices are recommended, including anti-criminal modeling, effective reinforcement and disapproval problem solving techniques, structured learning procedures for skill-building, and motivational interviewing.

Inter-Agency Communication: Aggressive referrals and advocacy for offenders for services in the community.

Evaluation: Routine evaluation through program audits, process evaluations of changes in criminogenic risk factors and follow up of recidivism rates.

Both practitioners and researchers are emphasizing the importance of individualized case management plans. When developed through objective assessments, individualized plans provide insight into the most effective means by which to monitor offenders and fashion effective interventions. This is especially true for high risk offenders for which the stakes are much higher for society. Effective case management utilizes programming that is performance-based and involves rewards for pro-social behaviors and punishments for violations of program rules.

Summary of Findings

Community Context

1. Delaware County has a declining population, but an increasing percentage of the population is Hispanic, African-American, or in "other" racial/ethnic categories.
2. Compared to the State of Indiana as a whole, Delaware County has a high unemployment rate. This poses a problem in placing ex-offenders in jobs.
3. Delaware County has a high rate of poverty compared to Indiana and the nation.
4. High school graduation rates were lower for Muncie Community Schools than other school corporations in Delaware County, and in comparison to the state as a whole.

5. Crime trends for Delaware County are unclear. Like most of the nation, the county experienced declining crime rates from 2000 until 2004. Crime rates increased for Delaware County in 2005.
6. Compared to Indiana as a whole, Delaware County has enjoyed relatively low rates of property crime and violent crime for the past five years.

Description of Available Programming

1. DCCC operates under the statutory authority of the Community Corrections Act, providing services to the Indiana Department of Corrections and to the Delaware County Courts.
2. DCCC offers the following programs:
 - a. Community Service Program
 - b. Court Alcohol and Drug Program
 - c. Forensic Diversion (Drug Court)
 - d. Community Transition Program
 - e. Day Reporting Program

Data Collection

1. The researchers based their findings and recommendations on interviews with DCCC staff members, data available from the Indiana Department of Corrections and the Indiana Judicial Center, and data derived from the Management Information System used by DCCC to track clients and cases.
2. For most of the findings, the researchers used data collected on adult clients since January 1, 2006.

Client Characteristics

1. Data is missing on many variables for a large percentage of clients, so the description of client characteristics should be used with caution.
2. Clients were likely to be young (under 26), male, and white.
3. Sixteen percent of clients had not completed high school or earned a GED.
4. Only 25% of clients were employed full time.
5. The majority of clients committed offenses involving drugs or alcohol. Over 40 percent committed OWI's or related offenses.

6. Nearly 55 percent of the clients committed A Misdemeanors, and about a quarter of the clients committed D felonies.
7. Data on prior arrests is missing for over 40 percent of the cases.
8. Data for 2,220 cases in 2006 indicate that, for most cases, the Court Drug and Alcohol Program was the primary (most intensive) correctional intervention. Home Detention was the second largest program.
9. Generally, the more intensive the correctional intervention, the more serious the offense involved. An exception is for Day Reporting, where a large number of cases involve infractions and minor misdemeanors.
10. Young clients are over-represented in the Drug and Alcohol Program.
11. White clients are over-represented in Felony Diversion Drug Court and the Ignition Interlock program.
12. Some, but not all, of the over-representation is attributable to variations in type and severity of offense committed.
13. Over half of DCCC clients were not referred for other services (or data is missing on referrals).

Outcomes in Adult Components

1. Computing success rates for different components involves comparing successful exits to unsuccessful exits.
2. Such comparisons can be misleading for a number of reasons. Therefore, "success rates" should be regarded as a very conservative measure of success.
3. Success rates were highest for the Ignition Interlock program, Community Transition, and the Drug and Alcohol Program.
4. Reasons for unsuccessful outcomes could not be determined from the available data.
5. An unsuccessful outcome was more likely for younger offenders, African American offenders, and offenders who had not completed high school or earned a GED.

Characteristics of Components

The researchers provided DCCC with detailed descriptions of the mission and client characteristics for each of the major program components within the agency. Space does

not permit a description of these findings here, but they provide the bases for recommendations related to the specific components.

Recommendations

From the perspective of "What Works," correctional interventions focus on the individual offender. Hence, a "what works" approach is successful only to the extent that there are effective data collection procedures in place. Further, the data that are collected must be valid in order to produce reliable information that can be used to make rational decisions about appropriate correctional interventions. This level of data collection has not always been a part of corrections work. With very little time to meet with one's clients, many practitioners have found it difficult to place a priority on data collection and entry into new computer systems. The consequences of this scenario are well known. They begin with the inefficient use of resources and end with ineffective interventions. On the other hand, the efficient use of resources and effective interventions can result in increased public safety, rehabilitation, and offender reintegration.

A review of the quality of data collected over the brief time that the new computer system has been used reveals that data from the last quarter of 2006 through the present have improved. We applaud the administrators at Delaware County Community Corrections for the leadership they have shown in implementing an information management system that will improve case management, the allocation of resources, and the safety and welfare of citizens of Delaware County.

General Recommendations

We have made several observations and offer the following recommendations. In this summary, we omit recommendations that are primarily related to internal agency procedures and focus on those involving the wider criminal justice system and community.

- It seems appropriate to improve communication with agencies external to community corrections. Initially, community corrections may wish to focus upon developing standards and procedures to improve communication and information sharing with the probation department. This recommendation is intended to

improve case management and data collection procedures. It is also intended to reduce the duplication of effort in gathering information, assessment, and supervision planning.

- Information from service providers is not readily available. Service providers should provide regular updates on the progress of DCCC clients. That information should be regularly updated in the electronic offenders files and used to adjust or respond to factors that either increase or decrease offender risk. In other words, this information is essential to case management.
- DCCC personnel should make regular visits to other county community corrections departments in order to share ideas and learn from other practitioners.
- A close relationship with the media is important to the survival and evolution of community corrections. Years of successful programs can be adversely affected by the heinous acts of one offender. The education of the public is critical to the long-term success of community corrections. Having the written press on one's side will help to defray the averse affects of recidivists. Community corrections in particular, and corrections in general, suffer from the lack of public confidence in what it does. In large part, this negative perception is a function of negative publicity. What the public knows at the local level is usually communicated through local newspapers, radio stations or through cable access channels. And, when corrections is talked about, it tends to be in regard to the failures of the system to protect the public from known offenders. Given this scenario, it is not surprising that the public tends to hold negative perceptions about community corrections programs. However, we can change public perceptions about corrections. Where does one start to address this problem? Most experts contend that the focus has to be on corrections personnel, i.e., decision makers. While some decisions about supervision and correctional services are made at the state level, the vast majority of those decisions are made at the local level. If the public trusts local decision makers, it will be inclined to also place its trust in local community corrections programs. Conceptually, what is recommended is to "put a face to" or personalize programs by demonstrating professional competency. Generally speaking, the public is unaware of how well educated corrections

professionals are or that there are professional certifications earned by corrections professionals.

- Until now, the information about community corrections that is mostly available for public consumption has been in reaction to law violations while offenders serve out their sentences. It might be appropriate to develop an extensive outreach effort (that is part of the strategic plan) that is proactive, not reactive. For example, the local newspaper could highlight community corrections program administrators, discussing why and how they became involved in corrections and their credentials. The local cable access channels could run public service announcements that inform the public of the types of programs available in the county. An expanded website could be available for those who are interested in knowing more about the "what works" approach of community corrections. Community corrections administrators should be present at all events sponsored by the mayor, social service agencies, or at other functions featuring community leaders that deal with crime and public safety. Law enforcement personnel have traditionally attended such events, but it is important for the public to also see corrections professionals. Public safety is not just a law enforcement function; it is also a corrections function. It may be appropriate to establish a public relations committee comprised of community corrections personnel, members of the judiciary and/or the advisory committee, faculty/students from the departments of journalism, marketing and criminal justice to devise a public relations plan that will lead to public trust and confidence.
- It appears that all the case managers and other staff members dealing with offenders in the adult components are white. Given that all the judges and probation officers in Delaware County are also white, we are concerned that this may give rise to perceptions of racial bias, even though we found no evidence of such bias in DCCC decision-making. We strongly urge DCCC to adopt aggressive personnel policies to seek and recruit qualified minority group members to serve as Case Managers.
- A final suggestion for success in a collaborative venture is continual planning and evaluation. Strategic planning through committees and/or an annual (or bi-annual)

retreat is essential for success. A strategic plan assists in providing a time line and sense of direction. And, in order to remain productive, boards/programs need to see what they have accomplished. Annual or semi-annual reviews of the strategic plan and identification of the goals, strategies, and objectives that have been accomplished provide everyone involved with a sense of achievement. The strategic plan should be integrated with the planning of probation and service providers. In conjunction with the courts and other corrections programming, the DCCC has the responsibility of supervising offenders sentenced to serve out their sentences in the community. This is a daunting responsibility that can be successful achieved by highly committed professionals and thoughtful planning. Strategic planning makes sense given that community corrections has traditionally been resource-limited. Yet, at the same time, the general public holds very high expectations that it will be safe from those who are under correctional control. A responsible justice system is one that is committed to making decisions and measuring progress based on actual data about program performance and offender recidivism. More specifically, the value of a strategic plan is influenced by the extent to which data are collected on performance measures and the extent to which those data play a critical role in evaluating program performance and embarking upon a data-driven planning process. We recommend that the DCCC should establish a strategic plan that incorporates relevant social service agencies, juvenile and adult probation, parole, and other private service agencies (such as church organizations). A good starting point to begin formulating a strategic plan is this report. That is, it should be fashioned to reflect the challenges of the community and the needs of offenders in order to provide the citizens of Delaware County a safe and secure community. We have provided worksheets that might be used to facilitate the planning process.

Specific Recommendations

Management Information System

Regular assessments of programs are important to continued adjustments to the needs of offenders and Delaware County. This requires improved data collection

procedures through the new PBS system. In part, improved data collection involves working with PBS representatives to identify how best to use drop down menus to reduce duplication and confusion.

Screening and Assessment of Offenders

Although technical fixes to improve the management information system are needed, an even greater concern is the link between:

1. Valid (verified) and reliable assessment of the risk and need factors for offenders.
2. Development of a detailed treatment plan in collaboration with the offender and with probation and service providers.
3. Implementation and monitoring of compliance with the treatment plan by the offender and by the agencies and programs involved.

Collaborative Case Management

Indiana Judicial Center regulations require probation officers to complete the Indiana Adult Risk Assessment Instrument for each offender. This is used to determine probation officer workload. Probation officers are also required to complete the Adult Reassessment Instrument and the Adult Needs Assessment instrument. These instruments require the probation officer to enter *verified* information regarding age at first conviction, number of prior convictions, number of prior community supervisions, etc. Most of the items on the Risk Assessment and Reassessment instruments do not call for a great deal of interpretation by the officer, and should therefore yield more reliable information than is the case with the LSI-R. We recommend that Delaware County probation officers forward the complete instruments to DCCC.

Use of Substance Abuse Screening Instruments

Although it appears that DCCC is doing substance abuse screening, it is not clear that the agency has availed itself of one of the many scored assessment instruments currently available. These instruments are valuable in enhancing the validity and reliability of substance abuse assessment. A number of low-cost and free substance abuse screening instruments are available and are described in an Appendix to the

document. One of these instruments should be adopted and used by DCCC to expedite assessment and referral for substance dependency.

Program Delivery

- Criminal justice personnel may want to reconsider the practice of allowing offenders the opportunity to buy themselves out of performing community service or other criminal sanctions. The offender could be obtaining the money illegally, completely undermining the main focus of any criminal justice agency; to rehabilitate the offender. Offenders who are financially supported by other family members or friends will also have the luxury of missing out on the punishment. The offender does not have the opportunity to reflect upon his/her wrong doing. However, the offender does have time to get involved in criminal activity. If a non-working offender is allowed to buy his/her way out of community service they should be sentenced to something else to occupy his/her time.
- Offenders should be sentenced to Day Reporting on the basis of clearly established criteria related to objective indicators of risk and need. Should clients with infractions, c and b misdemeanors be in Day Reporting? Does this constitute over-supervision?
- The living situation of each client should be documented. Do clients live in their own homes or apartments? With whom do they share living quarters? How often does their address change? Living arrangements can have a great effect on the success of the offender and unstable or unsuitable living arrangements should be addressed by case management plans.
- It appears that drug screening is done only once or twice for the majority of clients, and that in some cases, clients can make pretty accurate predictions about the likelihood that they will be asked for a urine sample. For example, it is rare for DCCC to request urine samples twice in the same week.

Evaluation Research

- We recommend that the DCCC commit to a long-term process of program assessment. This is a key element of the strategic plan mentioned earlier. The research reported here may serve as a template for ongoing research endeavors.

- We also encourage the DCCC Advisory Board to expand upon this project by evaluating DCCC professional staff, assessing offenders sentenced to the community, and surveying Delaware County residents. A systematic and ongoing assessment of DCCC programming, as well as gleaning a better understanding of corrections professionals, offenders, and the community would round out one's understanding of how best to protect and serve the citizens of Delaware County.

Present-day and Future Challenges

There are a number of social trends that should be considered in the strategic planning process. Whether they are considered alone or in combination with each other, these social trends portend challenges for the criminal justice system in general and community corrections in particular.

- The Muncie MSA, like other regions throughout the United States, has undergone significant economic change in recent years. The information reported earlier in this report reveals downward trends in the economy that have adversely affected employment and housing, two very important areas of life that are related to success among offenders who are supervised in the community.
- Poverty among women and children is particularly high in the Muncie MSA. This is a predictor of even more problems with crime control in the future.
- Dropping out of high school is a predictor of delinquency and the lack of education limits the number of jobs for which one is eligible. Further, income potential is limited.
- As is documented in the recent Weed and Seed grant application, there is substance abuse is quite prevalent in Delaware County and should be a major focus of correctional programming.