

EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR OFFENDER REFORM

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I. COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS AND CURRENT EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

I would like to start today with discussing two practical issues. First and foremost is the nature of community corrections. Second is the mandate and practice of community corrections. Again, acknowledging that I am speaking from the perspective of American corrections, in the United States, community corrections encompasses probation which is a post-conviction sentence to community supervision in lieu of incarceration and parole which is community supervision post-incarceration. While there are other tasks that may fall to community corrections, such as pre-trial release supervision, a vast majority of community corrections involves probation and parole.

In the US, these agencies supervise different types of offenders and are operated by different levels of government. Probation agencies are usually operated at the county-level (i.e., regions within states) and supervise relatively low-level, low-risk offenders, while parole agencies are operated at the state level and supervise those released from state prisons who have been convicted of serious felony charges and who may have been incarcerated from anywhere between one and 30 or more years. At year-end 2013, there were approximately 4.75 million adults under community supervision, representing nearly 2 percent of the US adult population (Herberman, & Bonczar, 2014). Of these, 3.91 million were probationers, while only 853,000 (or 18.0%) were parolees. In terms of crimes, 19% of probationers in 2013 were convicted of a violent crime, 29% a property crime, 25% a drug-related crime, and 17% of a public order crime. Of those eligible to complete probation in 2013, 67% successfully completed their terms with an average of 22 months served (Herberman, & Bonczar, 2014). In comparison, 33% of parolees were convicted of a violent crime or weapons-related offense, 22% a property crime, 32% a drug-related crime. Of those eligible to complete parole in 2013, 58% successfully completed their terms with an average of 22 months served (Herberman, & Bonczar, 2014).

Supervising these two sets of individuals and given the differences in the amount of time they have been removed from their home communities present different challenges for community corrections and should not be underestimated. Diversion from lengthy pre-trial or short-term post-conviction incarceration in local jails together with community sentences to probation increase the likelihood that people who have commitments in the community, whether that is a job or care for children or other family, will be able to maintain those important roles. This continuous connectivity is a resource for community corrections efforts to assist offenders in their reform process. Parolees, on the other hand, have vast deficits and disconnects due to longer incarcerations that they need to address to successfully reintegrate into their home communities.

The second point of clarification is the mandate and day-to-day practice of probation and parole. While community corrections emerged from a social welfare philosophy where officers served as mentors and connectors to institutions that could support success, in recent times community corrections has focused increasingly on its public safety mandate. This shift in focus emerged during the same period as the shift in attitude in corrections more generally. Stemming from the famous 1974 Martinson report entitled, "What works? Questions and answers about prison reform," the claim was made that rehabilitation is dead... nothing works. This led directly to the "get tough" on crime policies and punitive sentencing strategies of the 80s and 90s. Forced to manage a large increase in the number of people under correctional supervision

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and an increasing public panic about violent crime, corrections across the board refocused its resources toward surveillance and supervision with a specific and narrow focus on a single outcome of securing public safety. Specific strategies can be thought of as two-fold: identifying violations and increasing returns to jail and prison- thus reducing threats to public safety by incapacitating potential law breakers, and reducing offending behavior (i.e., recidivism) by directly intervening with probationers and parolees.

The current state of the art in evidence-based practices in community corrections is directly related to the popularization of the Risk, Needs, and Responsivity (RNR) principles first proposed by Andrews, Bonta and Hoge in 1990 and formalized within the psychology of criminal conduct by Andrews and Bonta in 1994. The RNR principles are based upon empirically demonstrated relationships between recidivism and (1) the known factors related to the high probability of criminal behavior (risk), (2) the drivers of criminal behavior (criminogenic needs) and (3) how types of offenders respond to interventions (responsivity). Evidence-based assessment tools, particularly the Level of Service Inventory (LSI) also developed by Andrews and Bonta, have been widely adopted by community corrections across the US and Canada. The domains assessed by the LSI-Revised include the “Big Four,” — those most highly associated with repeated criminal behavior — including history of antisocial behavior, (that is, past delinquent and criminal behavior), antisocial personality patterns (generally associated with the personality tendencies to repeatedly engage in risky, dangerous and/or aggressive behavior and a disregard for others), antisocial cognition (that is, attitudes, values and beliefs that rationalize, excuse or directly support criminal behavior) and antisocial peers (that is a preponderance of criminal peers over conventional peers); as well as (1) family/marital circumstances, (2) school/work, (3) recreation/leisure, and (4) substance use.

In essence, the idea is to match offender risks and needs to specific levels of supervision and target for intervention ONLY those needs that are directly related to the probability of future criminal behavior. For example, while offenders often present with substantial psychiatric and chronic health problems, these domains are not assessed since there is no consistent evidence that they “cause” criminal behavior. Therefore, while treatment may be important in the overall health and well-being of the individual, it is not a priority in reducing recidivism and would not be targeted for correctional intervention.

In practice and under its current mandate, community corrections plays two roles: surveillance/supervision and linkage to services and supports that reduce the probability of recidivism. There are few direct services provided by community corrections agencies. The exception is: assessment, direct supervision contacts, and referrals/follow-up. Each of these is key to supporting offender success, but none are guaranteed to assure offender reform.

The question is, what can be learned from desistance theories to enhance these activities? The current state of U.S. corrections in general and community corrections specifically, is based upon theories of criminality. That is, why, how and under what circumstances do people commit crimes. As we discussed yesterday, this is a very different question than the one that drives desistance theories. Specifically, desistance theories are interested in answering the question, why, how and under what circumstances do people who have a criminal history choose and maintain a pro-social lifestyle? If we were to distill the learnings from the desistance literature, we would identify several key elements:

- (1) developing a valued replacement self;
- (2) identifying and supporting meaningful things to do, including developing appropriate skills and behaviors to be successful;
- (3) enhancing informal social controls, including establishing routine daily activities, surveillance and guidance by pro-social others (e.g., spouse, work colleagues), pro-social activities during leisure time; and
- (4) reinforcing and incentivizing a welcoming community.

There are things that can be done within community corrections to assist in the desistance process and there are things that community corrections can do, partnering with the community, service agencies and ex-offenders, to further this mission.

II. REFORMING COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS TOWARD A DESISTANCE MISSION

If desistance theory were to be the dominant philosophy, community corrections activities would be different in the following ways:

- (1) Assessment and planning
- (2) Interpersonal interactions
- (3) Workforce development and rewards
- (4) Referrals and community partnerships

In regard to assessments, dynamic assessment models, such as the LSI-R and COMPAS are not necessarily in conflict with strengths-based assessment. For example, assessing the preponderance of criminal peers over conventional ones is one measure. The intervention derived from this is to change this weight toward a preponderance of pro-social peers. The strengths-based aspect flows organically from how this change may happen. What resources does the individual possess that would give him or her access to and acceptance by a pro-social network? Under this reoriented philosophy, elements of assessments cannot be separated, just as we cannot break a person into a simple set of unrelated problems. [To be fair, the current generation of risk assessment tools often include case management components (such as the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory)]. If people are complicated wholes and their future success is dependent on self-selected goals, "treatment" planning then requires a true partnership between the probation or parole officer and the supervisee to understand the hopes and aspirations, the contexts and the barriers that each person faces.

To truly hear, direct line officers must have excellent interpersonal skills. Motivational interviewing has been identified as an effective evidence-based practice in community corrections. There is nothing unknown about the elements of motivational interviewing. The advantage of using this as a training tool is that it is manualized. That is, your agency can teach its officers how to be effective listeners.

What can't be taught are the intangibles of empathy, caring and respect. Agencies whose hiring practices focus on officers' security skills will end up hiring people who are good at detecting violations and returning people to custody. Hiring practices that focus on desistance-oriented skills, including interpersonal skills AND attitudes, values and beliefs that people can and do reform their lives, together with resources to support people in their transformation, will result in a workforce that invests in the strengths and resiliencies of offenders with greater long-term success. This goal requires that agencies develop and disseminate its changing goals, staffing priorities and skill based criteria. In some ways, this may have consequences not only for hiring, supervision and promotion practices but for deployment as well. A desistance driven organization, however, cannot succeed without specifying the desired outcomes and, therefore, how officer performance is measured.

As discussed yesterday, the outcome of desistance cannot be an absence of a specific behavior, but must reflect the *presence* of observable and measureable results. Typically, strengths-based outcomes are idiosyncratic to the individual. That is, people decide on their own goals. While this may seem to be impossible from a management perspective, it is, in fact, how progress should be tracked and is consistent with health, behavioral health and educational planning. Further, it is clear that certain things are necessary for a fulfilling life for any human being, including safe and stable housing, belonging to a community, meaningful things to do, and pride in self. Three of these four are easily measureable, even if the fourth, pride in self, is inferred.

Each community corrections agency measures success in its own way. Typically, this is in terms of successful completion of the terms of supervision. What would an agency look like, if it consistently reported the percent of probationers/parolees who are actively engaged in education, vocational training, work and housing *of their choice*?

If community corrections agencies are limited to the direct impact they have by virtue of their officers'

one on one interactions, their effect need not be limited at all if agencies develop and engage the community at large in their efforts. Case management and linkages to individualized services are vulnerable to the same problems as assessment if the focus is on addressing offender deficits. Traditionally, this means the officer (or court) decides what is in the best interest of the offender and public safety, and the officer is responsible for referrals and overseeing offender performance.

However, it is critical to understand that what correctional experts believe will help and what offenders say are two different things. If asked, offenders believe that the assistance most likely to help them “go straight” are jobs, housing and education; not substance abuse or mental health treatment or cognitive behavioral interventions to change their criminogenic thinking or behavior. In a desistance-oriented framework where officers and supervisees are partners in the “success” plan, the mutual focus is on the resources needed to accomplish the steps toward an idiosyncratic individualized goal(s). Again, if the “success” plan is driven by the individual with the assistance of the officer, superior outcomes will be achieved.

To adjust to a desistance-oriented mission, community corrections agencies should review their provider networks, and, if necessary, change or enhance the membership toward what is most likely to have the greatest, long-term impact; for example, investing more heavily in relationships with junior colleges or trade schools over mandatory anger management classes.

III. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN OFFENDER REFORM

Community corrections agencies are truly limited in what they can directly affect in terms of offender reform. Much of change really exists within the individual, some within the community at large. Community corrections can be important partners, but are not always present in community-wide efforts.

For the remainder of my time, I would like to discuss a few key programmatic ideas that appear to be effective aspects of change, including literacy and education, health and wellness, workforce development and entrepreneurship, peer to peer programs, and social advocacy. In each of these cases, I will be presenting real programs. As I have said a number of times, identity and identity transformation are at the heart of reform. However, beyond this change in sense of self are necessary elements that sustain this transformation including positive social networks and meaningful work and activities. These programs have aspects of some or all of these things. Some are imbedded in the community, some within jails and prisons that are directed toward post-release. Even those that exist within institutions are transferrable to community settings.

We know that offenders often have low educational attainment and that many are functionally illiterate. Literacy training and education, though, are more than skills. They are engines of upward mobility and they are perceived as characteristics of competence and achievement. They also are pathways to identity transformation. I want to discuss two programs here. The first is a federally-funded Reading is Fundamental (RIF) literacy program for women at the Hampden County Correctional Center. The second is a prison college program. The RIF program was designed around the idea of bedtime stories where the focus of literacy was on the adult female offenders reading to their children during visits to the jail. It was believed that reading skills could be developed at the same time that parenting skills could be enhanced. What was discovered early on was that the women themselves had never had the experience of being read to. It was impossible for them to read to their children when they had no role models themselves. The staff took it upon themselves initially to do the reading. They settled the women with their children on the floor of a carpeted day room with lots of pillows and turned down the lights. The adults were as mesmerized by the stories as their children were. This simple activity had enormous payoff. First, this created a human recognition and valuing between the incarcerated women and the staff. Second, it increased the value of reading and therefore the skill in reading among the women. Third, it strongly enhanced the mother-child relationship — not only the incarcerated mother and her child, BUT also the relationship of the incarcerated woman to her own mother. For women especially, healing these relationships are key to their most important identities and, therefore, to their pride in self and probability for long-term success.

High school graduates on average earn more than non-graduates and college graduates more than high school graduates over the course of a lifetime. College attainment does enhance economic success, but

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more importantly, an educated citizenry increases democratic and civic engagement — reducing poverty, violence and hopelessness. Prison based college programs were defunded in the 80s, due to a public backlash against prisoners receiving benefits that not all free citizens could access. Only recently, and generally through substantial investments by private philanthropists, have these programs re-emerged. Two, one in New York called The University of Sing Sing and one in New Jersey called NJ Step, have been actively educating prisoners for at least several years. Sing Sing focuses on graduating students while in prison. This program and its extraordinarily low recidivism rate of 1% are highlighted in an HBO documentary that is cited in the references. It is clear that the educational process itself transforms prisoners' identities from convict to student (see also Hughes, 2012). Typically, these students invest more time and energy into their coursework than traditional college students, and they benefit from the confidence that successful coursework achievement brings. Keeping in mind that most prisoners have not done well in school and don't think they are smart or can succeed in school, much less college, this kind of success is truly transformative.

NJ Step also starts in prison, but is committed to following students out the door into the community, stating, "The New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons Consortium (NJ-STEP) is an association of higher education institutions in New Jersey that works in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Corrections and State Parole Board, to (a) provide higher education courses for all students under the custody of the State of New Jersey while they are incarcerated, and (b) assist in the transition to college life upon their release into the community. Our vision is that every person in prison who qualifies for college have the opportunity to take college classes while incarcerated and continue that education upon release."

Health and wellness are not generally considered to be related to desistance or reductions in recidivism, yet Hampden County Correctional Center has implemented a public health model that engages jail inmates in investing in their health and improves health literacy while preparing them for release. Central to this model is the contracting with community providers from the four largest areas from which the inmates come. This links inmate mental health and health care to the physicians in the community from which they came and to which they return. There are five basic elements for all services and programs, including: (1) early assessment and detection; (2) prompt and effective treatment at a community standard of care; (3) comprehensive health education; (4) a focus on prevention measures; and (5) continuity of care in the community upon release. In terms of benefits, HCCC states, "Inmates who are more involved in their own health care acquire knowledge and skills to avoid health risks, learn about positive health behaviors and can be active partners with their providers." This has resulted in reduced costs in jail and in the community and a substantially reduced re-incarceration rate. Essentially, the creators of this public health model believe that treating inmates with dignity and respect as one would a community member, helping them understand and manage chronic illnesses and be effective advocates for their health increases the likelihood that these individuals will engage in healthy behaviors after release (particularly abstaining from drugs and unprotected sex) and will seek help before they reach a point of a medical crisis.

Moving from individual health to community health, environmental strategies can reduce violence and perceived stress and increase overall community wellness. Vacant properties, a hallmark of neighborhood physical disorder, are associated with a range of negative health and safety outcomes including psychological distress, drug use, self-reported physical dysfunction, and crime. Recent research by my colleagues at Rutgers University found that abandoned and vacant properties in Newark, NJ were very significant attractors of many types of crime, especially gun violence. For example, places located within about 1.5 blocks of a vacant property have a six times greater likelihood of experiencing gun violence compared to places located farther away. Vacant land stabilization, a reproducible and straightforward program that cleans, greens, and maintains abandoned and vacant lots has had success in multiple U.S. cities. It has been shown to have a direct positive impact on the health, safety and economic well-being of communities. Specifically, vacant lot greening is associated with significant net reductions in total crime, including vandalism and aggravated assaults with guns, and net increases in residents' perceptions of safety around greened vacant lots compared with non-greened vacant lots. How is this related to desistance? Communities with a high degree of physical disorder also tend to have high proportions of justice-involved people. Visibly investing in spaces mobilizes the whole community, criminal and non-criminal alike, to value the neighborhood. It also increases sight lines and allows the community to better self-monitor. Further, if these initiatives are built around direct economic development, such as contracting with local vendors and/or

providing training in landscaping, it produces jobs and training for local residents, in addition to increasing land value.

In the US, we have an almost universal job application requirement. In most cases, there is a box that must be checked if the person was ever arrested or convicted. Some occupations will not allow persons with felony convictions to be employed at all; others are at the discretion of the employer. But in all cases, persons with criminal histories may be discriminated against in employment decisions without penalty. For many with criminal pasts, getting a job is one of the largest barriers to overcome. At the same time, work is how most Americans define who they are and what their value is to their families, communities and society.

In terms of creating real opportunities for earning a living wage this means one of two things: workforce development or entrepreneurship. The federal Second Chance Act has invested heavily in job development. The US Department of Labor supports many programs across the United States. Of particular note are programs that train justice involved individuals in high paying, and sometimes union membership, jobs. While these jobs still tend to be blue collar, such as electrician, plumber, and general construction workers, they do pay well and afford individuals real opportunities to support themselves and a family.

For example, YouthBuild is a national organization that is designed for disengaged youth (that is, youth who left school without a degree). It provides both educational opportunities and trade skills in construction. More importantly, it provides students with leadership opportunities. During their involvement with YouthBuild, students receive a stipend from AmeriCorps; a national program that, "places thousands of young adults into intensive service positions where they learn valuable work skills, earn money for education, and develop an appreciation for citizenship." Many of these youth are gang-involved, but they learn how to cooperate and problem solve together. On average, 80% of students who sit for the high school equivalency test, pass; 75% of students have earned their National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) credential; and less than 5% of former juvenile offenders commit an offense during program enrollment. Further, in Newark alone, YouthBuild students have built 32 units of affordable housing since 2003; serving and giving back to their home community.

In addition to construction-oriented job training programs, there are also many other specialty training opportunities; particularly in hospitality and culinary arts. Programs training individuals to be everything from sous chefs to sommeliers to bakers to full chefs exist across the country, including large programs in Camden, NJ, Philadelphia, PA, St. Louis, MO, Chicago, IL and many others.

One of the most notable comprehensive programs that also includes job training and placement is Homeboy Industries, currently operating in Los Angeles, its home town, and New York. Started as a job program only in one of the worst areas of L.A. to assist gang-involved young men and women get out of the gang life, it has now grown into a large-scale enterprise that owns a café and catering service, a bakery, a diner, and a food truck. Homeboy also has a clothing line. As a full scale national model, it also provides tattoo removal, legal services, job training and employment services, case management, education, and mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence services.

In the absence of job development and given the reluctance of mainstream businesses to take a chance on former offenders, self-employment is an important option, but the expertise and the funding necessary to start a business can be daunting. [As a resource, *Think outside the cell: An entrepreneur's guide for the incarcerated and the formerly incarcerated* by Steve Mariotti, the founder and president of the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship, was written to and for people with criminal histories to establish their own businesses.] Legal support to create businesses and business plans exist across the nation. Funding is more difficult. However, small amounts of money can be used effectively to help many people in single communities. Micro loans are becoming more common across the globe to support small start-ups. The idea is that with a small investment, for example, sometimes as little as two or three thousand dollars, a person can buy the tools and other necessities to create a handyman business. The options are endless.

A lot of attention has been given to the role of mentoring and peer mentoring (peer to peer programs) in the reform process and with good reason. Many mentoring programs exist across the US. They are

founded on the belief that concerned others can provide guidance as well as social capital to assist former offenders in their reintegration process. Theoretically, there are several processes at work here. First and foremost are positive regard and constant encouragement by, and involvement with, a pro-social other. This allows the individual to begin to explore non-criminal opportunities as well as begin to build self-esteem in the context of a legitimate world. Second, the mentor can provide direct advice to resolve personal and practical problems. Most importantly, the mentor is a source of social capital. The mentor serves as a go-between, vouching for the reliability and trustworthiness of the individual when needed for a job or housing, for example.

Peer mentoring provides another layer of meaning and support. Peer mentors are individuals who have similar life experiences to the persons they are mentoring, but have reached a place of stability where they believe they have something positive to offer others. In this case, of course, peer mentors are persons with criminal histories. There are distinct benefits for both the mentor and the mentee in these relationships. First, in discussing and problem-solving with someone who has similar life experiences, the mentor begins with greater expertise and credibility. The mentor also is more likely to have greater empathy and compassion for the mentee than those who are more socially distant, have a real belief that change can happen, and hold the mentee to higher expectations. The fact that the mentor has demonstrated the ability to reform gives the mentee hope that he or she too can change and be successful. Further, the mentor benefits directly through reinforcement of his or her commitment to reform, the implicit leadership training that mentoring provides, possible development of employable skills, and a sense of giving back—perhaps the most critical aspect of mentor benefits. Peer mentors work in both volunteer and professional capacities. They may be members of a peer organization, such as Broken Chains Ministry in Springfield, MA, where members meet regularly with inmates in the local jail to provide initial support, but more importantly welcome them after release and continue to meet together as a mutual support group. They may be paid employees of service or community corrections agencies. It is not uncommon in the US for formerly incarcerated people to be employed in social services as outreach and crisis workers and addiction and HIV counselors. In these cases, the role and importance of “generativity” and altruism that have been noted throughout the desistance literature is clear.

Before moving on to the final topic of advocacy, I would like to say something about the intersection of addiction and criminality and present a comprehensive peer-based model of recovery and reform. Addiction and crime are tightly entwined. Direct addiction experiences, such as public intoxication, driving under the influence, or possession of an illegal substance or paraphernalia, are crimes. Crimes are also committed to support drug habits, including sale or intent to sell drugs, property and violent crimes. In 2013, between 63% and 83% of arrestees in cities across the US tested positive for drugs (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2014). While the age-crime curve of crime peaks at about 17 years of age, the age-addiction curve grows slowly to its peak in the mid-30s and declines slowly after that. After the initial drop in crime in late adolescence due to the simple maturation and life transition effects, it is quite likely that desistance from crime and recovery from addictions go hand in hand. One cannot desist from crime successfully without getting clean and sober.

Currently, the addiction field is facing a challenge to integrate the concept of recovery into its paradigm. Recovery, like desistance, does not focus on desistance; that is, abstinence from alcohol and drug use. Recovery is concerned with measures of wellness and living a good life, such as large reciprocal social networks, positive (sober) activities and meaningful things to do, strong and healthy interpersonal relationships, and safe and stable housing. Unlike desistance-based corrections, the recovery concept is beginning to be diffused throughout the national conversation. The federal government has provided funding support to transform state addiction treatment systems into “recovery-oriented systems of care” and has funded the Recovery Community Services Program (RCSP; see ATQ Special Issue, Veysey (ed.)).

RCSPs are communities of people in recovery providing services and supports to other people in recovery. Some RCSPs focus on special populations, including justice-involved groups. The one RCSP program I would like to discuss is Welcome Home Ministries (WHM) located in southern California. It was founded by pastor Carmen Warner-Robbins in 1996, who visited women in prisons and jails near San Diego, CA. It has grown into a peer-driven, faith-based comprehensive program designed to assist women returning from jails and prison to the San Diego county area.

WHM has a model of transformation that was created by peers and participants. This model relies on several key assets. Assuring that basic health and mental health needs are met, the first element is a welcoming, supportive community. This community-building begins in facilities with in-reach by peer mentors and extends after release into a physical location where women can relax, meet with others, and develop leadership and mentoring skills. WHM's mentors, some of whom have gone on to completing college degrees after release, provide inspiration and hope simply by being role models. More importantly, they provide unconditional love and empathy in their interactions. It is a profound experience to watch a simple touch and kind word reduce a woman to tears, saying, "no one has ever done that for me." In addition, WHM contracts for *pro bono* dental and eye care. Because so many have abused drugs, especially methamphetamines, for so long, they have lost teeth and are ashamed of their appearance. They say that being able to smile again, in and of itself, makes a difference in their interactions and their ability to be treated as normal citizens in their communities.

These three things increase self-esteem and lead women to believe that they are deserving of love and belonging. At this point, they are able to begin to restore "all the things they have lost over given up" in their lives, including relationships with family and children, pride in themselves, trust of others. Together with opportunities to give back, their collective goal is a happy, joyous and free life. Note that there is no discussion in this model of abstinence or desistance. In conversations, I have asked them about this. Their response is that, if they work toward achieving these goals, drugs and criminal lifestyles fall by the wayside without a need to address them directly.

WHM has been so successful in the San Diego area that the Sheriff and administrator of Las Colinas jail provided the group a pod in the jail to operate an honors living program. The director of the pod is Donna, who at one time was a prostitute and meth dealer. She has completed a master's degree in pastoral counseling and her long record has been expunged based upon her contributions to the community and her personal transformation.

As discussed earlier, providing ex-offenders with the tools and support they need to be successful is one half of what must be done to truly integrate former offenders into society. The other half is what needs to be done in the community so that ex-offenders will be welcomed and provided with real opportunities to live a good life. In this area, there is much work to be done and several examples of the kinds of activities that may be pursued, including legislative changes, education, and advocacy groups and campaigns.

Over the past several decades, the US has pursued increasingly punitive criminal justice policies that have effectively excluded many from educational and vocational opportunities, stripped them of their citizenship right to participate in the democratic process (i.e., vote), and created additional hardships through the denial of financial and housing supports. These policies must be repealed. As we begin to move in this direction, two New York State examples come to mind. First is the repeal of the Rockefeller drug laws that either decriminalizes certain behaviors or reduces the penalties. Second is a proposal put forth by Governor Andrew Cuomo last week that would increase the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18, moving non-violent and minor crimes of young people to Family Court, reversing a national trend toward prosecuting ever younger people in criminal court. Both of these have the intent of keeping people out of the criminal justice system, if possible, and reducing the life-long consequences of a criminal record. This clears the way for young people, in particular, to put past bad behavior behind them as they transition into adulthood.

Changing social perceptions is a difficult business. Currently popular media continues to vilify offenders, reinforcing negative stereotypes of justice-involved people trying to find their way in the world. This area requires a commitment to constant advocacy that simply doesn't exist today. However, there are some glimmers of hope. In educating the very young, Sesame Street has taken on difficult topics, including parental incarceration (See, for example, Little Children, Big Challenges: Incarceration). This is a first step and heavily relies on social media for its impact; in this case, the use of YouTube. On-line and social media now plays a much greater role as the venue of choice to get advocacy messages out to the public. Advocacy organizations, such as the Institute for Social Justice, the Sentencing Reform Project, the Innocence Project, the Fortune Society and Think Outside the Cell, all are working diligently to reduce the stigma and structural barriers facing offenders and their families through social media. Recently, I have been working with Sheila Rule of Think Outside the Cell. In our collaboration, we used a Rutgers college

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course to acquaint students with real people who had been incarcerated and then to design campaign materials. A remarkable transformation occurred within the classroom, nearly as profound as the transformation of our formerly incarcerated volunteers. One student made an early claim that he would never leave his children with an ex-offender, no matter how much the person claimed that he or she had changed. After his interview, he recanted his statement. He said that he learned so much and this person would be the first one he would leave his kids with.

In summary, here's my simple take away message, engage people where they are; use all possible natural resources, whether it is health, education, work, family or community, to hook them into investing in themselves; provide any additional resources to reinforce emerging changes; and, to the extent, possible, clear the way back into a welcoming community.

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