

Recommendations for Ideal Hiring Practices for Community Based Corrections Staff for  
the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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Recommendations for Ideal Hiring Practices for Community Based Corrections Staff for  
the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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## Abstract

Recommendations for Ideal Hiring Practices for Community Based Corrections Staff for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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### **Statement of the Problem**

As the number of offenders in prisons, jail or on community correctional supervision continues to grow, so does the need to hire qualified personnel. Law changes, sentencing philosophies and economic downturns have caused for a significant increase in the number of offenders being sentenced to some form of correctional control. According to the United States Department of Justice (2007), there were 2,245,189 inmates in local jails, State and Federal prisons in 2005. Ten years prior in 1995, there were only 1,585,586 inmates (USDOJ, 2007). The increase from 1995 to 2005 was approximately seventy percent. Should these growth rates remain constant; this will translate into a nationwide need of 2500 prison beds and 500 new correctional officers per month (Allen, Latessa, Ponder, and Simonsen, 2007). The numbers being supervised in the community also showed significant increases. Those on probation or parole totaled 3,757,282 in 1995 (USDOJ, 2006). In 2005, the number of offenders under community supervision increased to 4,946,944 offenders (USDOJ, 2006). This increase represents growth of approximately thirty-three percent. Too often a period of probation supervision only delays entry into the institutional setting. According to the Bureau of

Justice (2007), eighteen percent of probationers who exited supervision during 2006 were incarcerated. Especially noteworthy is the fact that nine percent of those probationers were incarcerated due to a rule violation while only 4% were incarcerated because of a new criminal offense (BOJ, 2007). The nine percent of probationers that were incarcerated as a result of rule violations, sometimes referred to as technical violations, represents approximately half a million offenders.

### **Methods of Approach**

Information for this paper will be based on secondary sources. These sources will include those from the fields of law enforcement, social work, and community corrections. These sources will come from accredited journals, textbooks, the National Institute of Corrections and data provided by the United States Department of Justice. I will also explore professional journals that address hiring practices. I will reference the New Jersey Intensive Surveillance and Supervision Program and its evaluation of officer orientations. I will focus the results of NIC research and how it can be applied to interviewing practices.

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

Implementing ideal hiring practices will lead to a decrease in the numbers of offenders that are on probation or parole that end up in prison for technical and new law violations. Effective assessing and interviewing of potential staff will reduce the need to deal with correctional personnel that don't understand their role as agents of change. It will increase community safety due to reduced offender violations and new criminal offenses.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION: NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT IN COMMUNITY-BASED CORRECTIONAL STAFF HIRING PRACTICES TESTING FOR ABILITY TO FACILITATE PROSOCIAL CHANGE IN OFFENDERS**

The number of offenders under community based corrections continues to grow each year. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2008), the annual percentage change from 2006 to 2007 was 2.1 percent, going from 5,014,400 to 5,117, 500 people under adult probation and parole, often referred to as community-based supervision. The largest increase was experienced in Colorado which was 23.2 percent (BJS, 2008). In the United States during calendar year 2007, parole with a growth rate of 4.5 percent saw a more significant increase than probation (BJS, 2008). According the Bureau of Justice (2008), between the years of 1995 and 2005 the number of parolees increased by 13 percent. By year end 2007 there were over 824,000 offenders on parole (BJS, 2008). These numbers are significant as parolees face unique challenges in the reentry process to include substance abuse problems, mental health issues and the securing of adequate employment. Therefore, as the number of offenders on parole continues to grow, so does the need for qualified community-based corrections staff.

When most inmates exit prison onto parole, they have unmet needs which leave them ill-equipped to make pro-social changes. According to Petersilia (2000), 70 to 80 percent of State prisoners need substance abuse treatment while just 13 percent actually receive it while incarcerated. Being released from an artificial environment without completion of substance abuse treatment into a community where drugs are readily available to the drug abuser is a recipe for failure. Mental illness is also very prevalent



in those that were previously incarcerated. Longer periods of confinement in overcrowded prisons can cause serious psychological problems. Nearly one in every five inmates in prison reports having a mental illness (Ditton, 1999). Many prisons lack the resources to address mental health issues of inmates while incarcerated and lack of release planning for these inmates exacerbates the problem. Employment is also a barrier that is encountered by released offenders. Lack of employment has been identified in the correctional field as a risk factor for re-offending. The stigma attached to incarceration coupled with the time out of the labor market which interrupts individuals' job experience and prevents them from building important employment skills makes it difficult for ex-prisoners to be hired (Travis, Solomon, Waul, 2001). Studies have also shown that having a job with decent wages is positively associated with lower rates of re-offending (Travis, 2001). In order to overcome these barriers, parolees need to be better equipped with pro-social change skills. Behavioral changes are possible if offenders are provided with programming that addresses their individual needs (Taxman, Young, Byrne, Holsinger, Anspach, 2002).

Many parolees that re-enter the community and are ill-equipped to make pro-social change return to prison. According to a 15 State study tracking prisoners released in 1994, 67.5 percent were rearrested within three years (BJS, 2004). This study also concluded that the re-arrest rate for drug offenders significantly increased from 50.4 percent in 1983 to 66.7 percent in 1994 (BJS, 2004). Although some of the inmates return as a result of committing new crimes, many return because their parole supervision was revoked. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007), 469,768 inmates exited prison in 2005. Of that total, 51,146 were returned as a result of a new sentence while

119,531 were sent back to prison as a result of their parole supervision being revoked (BJS, 2007). In other words, approximately 11 percent of released inmates returned as a result of a new criminal conviction while close to 26 percent returned because of a parole revocation. Revocation occurs when parolees violate the terms and conditions of their community supervision. Although these violations, often referred to as technical violations, are not the result of new criminal offenses, they are often viewed as precursors for criminal behavior. The violations that are cited most often are closely linked to substance abuse and/or absconding from supervision. And lastly it should be noted that 51,500 of the released inmates in 2006 or 11 percent were returned as a result of absconding from their supervision. Absconding is failing to report to the supervising agent as directed and/or changing their place of residence without informing their supervising agent.

In order for parolees to be successful, parole officers need to be agents of change. They need to understand the stages of change that ex-inmates must go through in order to address their problematic behavior. Parole officers must recognize where the parolee is in the stage of change model. The stages of change include pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance (Prochaska and Diclemente, 1994). Agents must then utilize motivational interviewing skills to assist the parolee in moving through the stages of change to address their problematic behaviors while helping them to develop effective pro-social changes skills (Miller and Rollnick, 2002).

Community based correctional organizations must create hiring practices that help to identify skills and competencies that agents need to possess in order to be agents of changes. Interviews must focus on the candidate's knowledge of research based

strategies, their ability to detect antisocial behavior and thinking and the ability to match treatment modalities with parolees needs (Stinchcomb, McCampbell and Layman, 2006). Focusing on the skills and competencies needed to be effective will result in more qualified staff being hired. The structured interview process is also a necessary step in hiring qualified candidates. The structured interview is one of the most effective tools at predicting the likelihood that quality candidates will be selected. According to Cavanaugh (2004), the structured interview has a validity of .51 in its effectiveness at predicting future job performance. This is higher than the validity for personality tests, unstructured interviews and reference checks (Cavanaugh, 2004). Structured interviews can yield significant information about the applicant to include intelligence, articulateness, self-confidence, affability, and ability to remain focused on a task (Cavanaugh, 2004). The questions must be the same for all candidates while allowing the same amount of time to answer. Standardized scoring is also necessary and will increase the validity and reliability of the interview. Corrections administrators must ensure that an adequate amount of focus and energy is placed on this step. Inconsistencies or allowing the interview to become unstructured will not yield the information needed to make good selections

First, this research will examine the current trends in the parole system along with the need for parolees to develop pro-social change skills in order to be successful. Second, this research will show that increasing amounts of revocations that are a result of parolees having weak pro-social skills. The lack of community-based correctional staff's ability to motivate and influence pro-social skills with parolees contributes to parolee's lack of success in the community. The crime control and social service model will serve as theoretical framework for the development of ideal hiring practices. This research will

also focus on the social learning model and how it plays a key role in the success of the parole officer in their work with ex-inmates.

This paper will serve as an educational tool that can be used by all community-based corrections agencies in their hiring practices. Recommendations for hiring practices of ideal community-based correctional staff which focus on the necessary qualifications to be able to facilitate pro-social change in hopes to better equip offenders on parole to be successful and productive citizens of society. The ability to hire effective community-based correctional staff will have a significant impact on the number of offenders that are revoked during their period of parole. Community corrections staff that are hired with the core competencies needed to impact offender behavior change and are trained as agents of change can promote pro-social behavior within the correctional population. In addition to reducing the burden on our overtaxed prison system, effective supervision can have a significant impact on crime.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW: INCREASING AMOUNTS OF INMATES ON PAROLE, INCREASING AMOUNTS OF REVOCATION, WEAK PRO-SOCIAL CHANGES SKILLS OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONAL STAFF AS A RESULT OF INEFFECTIVE HIRING PRACTICES.**

### **A. Increasing Amounts of Inmates on Parole**

The criminal justice system in the United States continues to arrest, prosecute and sentence criminal offenders at an alarming rate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Law changes, sentencing philosophies and economic downturns have caused a significant increase in the number of offenders being sentenced to some form of correctional control. Mandatory minimum sentences, determinate sentencing structures, habitual offender penalties, and “three strikes” laws have contributed to the correctional control binge. According to Mackenzie (2001), in the 1980s and 1990s every state adopted some type of mandatory minimum sentencing law. Many states adopted mandatory minimums for violent crimes that require offenders to serve 85 percent of their sentence. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2004), from 1993 to 1999 the average mean time served in prison by violent offenders in determinate or “truth-in sentencing” states increased from 41 to 50 months. Many states also established habitual offender laws that mandate increased sentences based on prior criminal convictions. “Three-strikes” laws call for increased penalties for certain categories of felonies until the third-strike which results in a sentence of 25 years to life in prison. By 1997, twenty-four states had passed “three-strikes” laws (Mackenzie, 2001).

The effects of these changes have produced a significant increase in the number of offenders in prison, jail or on community-based correctional supervision. According to the United States Department of Justice (2007), there were 2,245,189 inmates in local

jails, state and federal prisons in 2005. Ten years prior in 1995, there were only 1,585,586 inmates (USDOJ, 2007). The increase from 1995 to 2005 was approximately 70 percent. Our current prison system is already operating beyond its designed capacity. According to Harrison and Beck (2006), federal prison systems were operating at 40 percent above rated capacity while state prison systems were 15 percent over their rated capacity in 2004. Should these growth rates remain constant; this will translate into a nationwide need of 2500 prison beds and 500 new correctional officers per month (Allen, Latessa, Ponder, and Simonsen, 2007). According to Petersilia (2000), eighty percent of returning prisoners are released to parole supervision and assigned to a parole agent. During the year of 2006 that translated to a parole population in the United States of close to 800,000 parolees (BJS, 2007)

The number of offenders being supervised on probation in the community has also showed significant increases. Those on probation totaled 3,077,861 in 1995 (USDOJ, 2006). In 2005, the number of offenders under probation supervision increased to 4,166,757 offenders (USDOJ, 2006). This increase represents growth of approximately 27 percent. Often times a criminal sentence to probation only delays entry into the institutional setting. According to the Bureau of Justice (2007), 18 percent of probationers who exited supervision during 2006 were incarcerated. Most are incarcerated as a result of having their probation revoked. When violations of supervision occur, which may include the commission of new crimes, revocation hearings are held. During the probation revocation hearing process if a preponderance of evidence suggests that the probationer is in violation of their supervision conditions then the judge can re-sentence them to an array of options to include incarceration.

According to Schmalleger (2007), approximately 46 percent of all parolees nationwide successfully complete their parole, while 26 percent are returned to prison for parole violations and 11 percent return for new criminal offenses. Therefore, 54 percent of all parolees do not successfully complete their period of parole. Specific research conducted in California showed similar results with high rates of offenders returning to prison for technical violations. According to Allen (2007), technical probation violations are violations of conditions of supervision that might not be illegal per se, but are interpreted as indicators of future illegal behavior. Prior to 1980, the highest rate of felon parolees returned to prison in California for technical violations was 11.4 percent. From 1980 to 2004, there was a dramatic increase in technical violation revocations with a high of 68.1 percent in 1989. Most years within that time period fall in the 50 percent range. In contrast, the rate of felon parolees returned to prison as a result of new crimes for the same time period never got above 21.1 percent, with the typical range in the teens (California DOC, 2005).

### **B. Parolees Need for Pro-Social Change Skill Ability to Be Successful**

An increasing amount of revocations among parolees is a direct result of their ineffective pro-social change skills. According to Taxman (2002), it is apparent that many offenders fail in the community settings because of a combination of factors, including the offender's own resistance to lifestyle change. Resistance to lifestyle change is a consequence of having ineffective pro-social changes skills which is often a result of substance abuse issues and/or mental illness. The ability for these offenders to identify the need to change and progress through the stages of change is paramount if they are to

overcome their problems and become a productive member of society. Offenders must be motivated to move from the stage of precontemplation stage through the contemplation stage while ending up in the determination stage. In other words, they must come to the realization that they need to make pro-social changes and decide to take action. Most offenders that are released on parole and have not received any form of treatment in the institutional setting and therefore, may not have confronted barriers to change. In other words, they are unaware of their problem so there is no initiative on their part to change. Inaction on their part will often lead to continued violation of societal norms as well as parole rules. Consequences of their weak pro-social change skills will ultimately result in a return to prison.

### **C. Increasing Amount of Revocation Among Parolees Due to Ineffective Pro-Social Change Skills**

As stated previously, Petersilia (2000) reports that 70 to 80 percent of State prisoners need substance abuse treatment while just 13 percent actually receive it while incarcerated. Therefore, a majority of parolees that are returning to the community have untreated substance abuse problems. These problems often remain untreated due to the parolee's lack of insight into their need to receive substance abuse treatment which will aid in their development of prosocial skills. Failure to recognize their problem and receive appropriate treatment often times results in parole violations or the commission of drug related crimes. According to a parole violations and revocation study in California, drug and property offenders are prone toward accumulating violations that involved drug use and possession, which constitutes the highest proportion of all violations in the study (Grattet, Petersilia, Lin 2008). Mental health issues are also quite common among



inmates that are confined in local jails and state prison. At midyear 2005, it was reported that more than half of all prison and jail inmates had a mental health problem (James and Glaze, 2006). In order to be successful, parolees with mental health issues needs to be involved with treatment programs designed to address all of their problematic behavior. More than one third of mentally ill state inmates indicated a history of alcohol dependence and nearly six in ten indicated they were under the influences of alcohol or drugs while committing their current offense. This combination is a strong predictor of recidivism (Travis, 2001). According to a study in California, parolees with a record of mental health problems have higher risks for all violations and they have particularly elevated risks for the most violent criminal violations and technical violations. They have 41 percent higher risk of absconding, 70 percent higher risk of technical violations other than absconding, and 32 percent higher risk of criminal violations (Grattet, Petersilia, Lin 2008). Lack of attainable employment is also a barrier that cannot be overcome without proper pro-social change skills. The possibility of gainful employment is elusive for the recently incarcerated offender. According to Petersilia (2000), one year after release as many as 60 percent of former inmates are not employed in the legitimate labor market. Most employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders and as the economy worsens, so will job prospects for parolees. In order for parolees to be successful they will need to develop the pro-social skills necessary to address their drug problem and/or mental health issue while securing legitimate and gainful employment. Without these skills, they will likely return to criminal behavior or commit violations of their supervision that will ultimately result in revocation and a return to prison.

#### **D. Weak Pro-Social Change Skills of Parolees as a Result of Weak Pro-Social Change Skills of Community-Based Corrections Staff**

The philosophy that has shaped the role of the parole officer is different than that of the probation officer. According to Abadinsky (2009), parolees are generally considered a greater danger to the community than what probationers are considered. Parole officers often take a law enforcement approach to their supervision of parolees. As a result, surveillance and control have been the underlining philosophies of parole supervision. Increased office appointments, drug and alcohol testing, and home visits have been the cornerstone of this approach with the ultimate goal being the detection of violations, most often technical in nature. Technical violations have traditionally been viewed as a precursor to criminal behaviors. Therefore, increased detection that has resulted from this approach has resulted in higher rates of parole revocations resulting in a parolees return to prison. As previously noted, 26 percent are returned to prison for parole violations (Schmallegger, 2007). This approach to supervision has proven to be ineffective at promoting prosocial change skills in parolees. A model designed around surveillance and control has done nothing more than yield a higher level of detection of technical violations which ultimately has led to a return to prison for parolees. According to Taxman (2002), new models of supervision were spurred further by a growing body of research showing that a narrow focus on monitoring and surveillance had negative effects, leading to more technical violations and recycling of parolees through the criminal justice system.

Parole agents that have weak pro-social changes skills cannot impact changes in paroles that also have weak pro-social change skills. In the past, many parole staff have approached their job from an accountability and law enforcement approach. The

enforcement of rules and the detection of violations has been the focus. But in order for parolees to obtain pro-social changes skills, parole staff needs to be able to motivate offender to make changes. In order for agents to do this they must possess motivational interviewing skills. Motivational interviewing is a directive, client centered counseling style for eliciting behavior changes by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence (Miller and Rollnick, 2002). This style is more focused and goal-directed and the motivation to change come from the client. Parole officers also need to understand the Stages of Change that ex-inmates must go through in order to obtain pro-social change skills. The Stages of Change model involves six stages that take a person from the beginning - learning to identify a problem - to the end – learning to cope and living without that problem (Prochaska and Diclemente, 1994). Parole Agents must understand the different stages that parole must go through in order to obtain pro-social change skills. These stages include precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. They must be able to identify which stage the offender is in and through their use of motivational interviewing skills, be able to assist in directing them to the next stage of change. Behavior change is possible if offenders are provided with tailored, sequential programming that addresses their individual needs (Taxman, 2002).

#### **E. Weak Pro-Social Changes Skills of Community Correctional Staff as a Result of Ineffective Hiring Practices**

In the past, many community based corrections organizations have utilized ineffective hiring practices. Corrections have used various screening criteria and interviewing techniques in the search for and selection of qualified candidates. Some techniques have continued only because of tradition. These techniques will fail in

helping to identify and select effective parole staff. Many agencies recruit employees based on an identification of skills required to do the job today, rather than projecting what will be need to do the job to meet future needs (Stincomb, McCampbell, Layman, 2006). The area of hiring needs to be reconsidered by most correctional organizations due to the shift in philosophies that have occurred. Community based corrections has been moving from a philosophy with a control focus to one of motivating pro-social changes within the correctional population. Personality assessments have been a staple of law enforcement and corrections agencies for some time. According to Barret (2003), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is used by seventy-one percent of all municipal police departments. The MMPI has the ability to identify possible mental health and personality disorders. Although the MMPI can provide insight into interpersonal relations tendencies, it may prove more beneficial as a tool to screen out inappropriate candidates then to identify those that will make for a successful correctional worker. The unstructured interview is often used to select employees. According to Cavanagh (2004), the unstructured interview has a validity of .11 in its effectiveness at predicting future job performance. They do not contain any element that would help to identify those individuals that possess strong pro-social change skills. They do not help to determine the traits of the individual candidates and whether or not they possess an orientation that will promote pro-social changes in offenders. Paporozzi and Gendrau (2005) found that intensive supervision parolees who were supervised by parole officers who possessed exclusively social work or law enforcement professional orientation had higher recidivism rates than parolees supervised by parole officers possessing a balanced professional orientation. Hiring practices for parole officer need to change. They need

to focus on the identification of skills and competencies that will promote pro-social change skills with offenders.

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRIME CONTROL MODEL, SOCIAL SERVICE MODEL AND SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY.**

#### **A. Crime Control Model**

Parole officers have traditionally performed many different functions. Some of these functions have included information manager, evaluator, assessor, educator, mediator, agent of detection, investigator and enforcer (Abadinsky, 2009). These roles fall into one of two traditional models of community based correctional supervision: the crime control model or the social service model. Although these models are not incompatible, they are often seen as such. Traditionally, law enforcement agencies would be marked as using a crime control model while substance abuse and other social service agencies typically use a social service model. In community-based corrections, a control model focuses on the immediate protection of the community. Control of the client's activities and detection of violations with immediate responses is the cornerstone of this approach. Home visits, drug and alcohol testing and a close relationship with law enforcement are characteristics of the crime control model (Abadinsky, 2009). Programs such as Intensive Supervision, electronic monitoring and home confinement are based on this approach to supervision.

#### **B. Social Service Model**

The social service model focuses more on the clients needs. Referral to treatment programs, assistance with employment and housing, and psychological support are important components of this model (Abadinsky, 2009). The offender is the focus in this model and decisions are based on the offender's needs. Many assessments utilized by

community-based corrections agencies have needs identification as a component. Once criminogenic needs are identified, appropriate referrals to treatment, education or other social services are made. Although this model does not ignore community safety, often offender betterment is the primary focus.

### **C. Combination of the Crime Control and Social Service Model**

Parole programs and officers that have learned to use the balanced approach, which is a combination of the crime control and social service model, has the greatest success with parolees. According to a review of the study of an Intensive Parole Supervision Program in New Jersey by Paparozzi and Genera (2005), it was discovered that parole programs that provided more treatment, employed parole officers with a balance of law enforcement/social casework orientation and are implemented in supportive organizational environment may reduce recidivism from 10% to 30%. It is also worth stating again that new models of supervision were spurred further by a growing body of research showing that a narrow focus on monitoring and surveillance had negative effects, leading to more technical violations and recycling of parolees through the criminal justice system (Taxman, 2002).

### **D. Social Learning Model**

Social learning theory also supports the notion that parole officers can promote pro-social change in parolees if the officer possesses the necessary skills, competencies and orientation. According to Siegel (2001), social learning theorists believe that crime is a product of learning the norms, values and behaviors associated with criminal activity.

This theory falls in line with the argument that weak pro-social change skills in ex-inmates lead to continued involvement in anti-social behaviors including the violation of parole conditions as well as the commission of new crimes. Within the realm of social learning theory are differential association, differential reinforcement, and neutralization. These theories all support the notion that people learn criminal behavior much like they learn conventional behavior (Siegel, 2001). Therefore, parole officers that possess strong pro-social changes skills will be able to adequately address parolees with weak pro-social changes skills and impact positive change.



#### **IV. EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS THAT EXIST**

There are two models that show promise in the area of promoting pro-social change skills among parolees. Both of these models spell out characteristics and attitudes that need to be considered when hiring corrections staff. The New Jersey Surveillance and Supervision program has been evaluated and has shown a correlation between Parole officer orientation and offender success. The National Institute of Corrections has created a guide that assistance in the identification of hiring candidates who possess the necessary principles, competencies and orientation to be agents of prosocial change.

##### **A. New Jersey Surveillance and Supervision Program**

An evaluation of the New Jersey Intensive Surveillance and Supervision Program (ISSP) was done in 1987. The purpose of the evaluations was to determine the factors that influence a reduction in offender's recidivism. The elements that were studied included the type and amount of services received by the offenders, the organizational supportiveness of ISSP and the assessment of the Probation/Parole Officer orientation. The orientation of the officer proved to be a very influential factor in the success of the parolee. In determining orientation, the Parole Officer Punishment and Reintegrative Orientation Questionnaire was administered to each officer. The results placed each officer into one of three categories: punishment orientation, social casework orientation or a blend of law enforcement and social casework orientation. The officers that had a balanced orientation utilized techniques to include appropriate identification and referral to treatment services, leading peer support sessions, and providing an adequate amount of structure and supervision (Paparozzi and Gendrau, 2005). The

outcome measures based on officer orientation in the New Jersey ISSP model provided quite remarkable results.

The revocation rate for the law enforcement orientation officers was 58.8 percent, the social work orientation officers were 37.9 percent and the balanced officers was 19 percent (Paparozzi and Gendrau, 2005). Also studied were the rates of revocation based on a new criminal conviction. These results were revealed that a balanced approach had a more significant impact on offenders' behavior. Revocation for a new criminal conviction among this study groups showed 16.2 percent for those supervised by a law enforcement orientation o parole officer, 32.3 percent for social work orientation officer and 6.3 percent for the balanced approach officer. This research supports the idea that parole officers that possess pro-social change skills, which are a balance of social service and crime control model, are able to have significant influences on the parolees they supervise. A direct outcome of their approach through the use of prosocial change skills is that the parolees are less likely to be revoked, and even more importantly, that they are less likely to be revoked for the commission of a new criminal offense.

### **B. National Institute of Corrections-Identifying Core Competencies**

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has created a guide designed to assist corrections agencies with addressing the immediate need of hiring qualified candidates who possess the necessary principles, competencies and orientation to be effective correctional employees in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. They conducted numerous cases studies and research to support their recommendations. The National Institute of Correction's specific recommendations of core competencies that future employees

working in community-based corrections agencies should possess include: knowledge of human behavior, ability to motivate others, interpersonal skills and critical thinking skills (Stincomb, McCampbell, Layman, 2006). These competencies match the ones that parole agents must possess in order to have strong pro-social change skills. As previously stated, agents with strong pro-social change skills have knowledge of the “Stages of Change” model, have the ability to identify where the parolee is within the change model, and possess the motivational interviewing skills that will assist in moving the parolee through the stages. This guide also goes on to list the elements necessary for effective intervention. They include principles such as enhancing intrinsic motivation, targeting interventions, and increasing positive reinforcements (Stincomb, McCampbell, Layman, 2006). These principles identified by the National Institute of Corrections are also reflective of the traits that parole officers with who possess strong pro-social change skills.

These two models promote promising practices in the area of hiring corrections staff that possess the skills, competencies and abilities to promote pro-social change in parolees. These models will serve as a guide for two necessary steps needed to identify effective staff: attitudinal assessments and structured interviews. Both of these areas will be addressed in-depth in the recommendation section.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IDENTIFICATION AND HIRING PRACTICES OF PAROLE AGENTS**

The number of parolees that exit our prison system continues to rise. The barriers that they face upon their release make it difficult to become productive members of society. The ability to develop pro-social change skills is paramount for their success. In order to increase parolee's ability to make this transition, parole agents must also possess the necessary pro-social change skills. Parole agents that have weak pro-social changes skills cannot impact changes in parolees that also have weak pro-social change skills. Two methods that can help to identify potential staff that is likely to possess such skills and abilities include attitudinal assessments and the structured interview.

### **A. Attitudinal Assessments to Determine Parole Agents Orientation towards Pro-Social Change of Parolees**

The O'Leary Sanctioning exercise is a scenario based assessment. It presents ten hypothetical crime related situations and provides four possible sanctions or responses to each of the scenarios. Each possible response is then ranked based on the most appropriate response to the least appropriate response. After all ten scenarios are ranked; the scores are totaled placing the individual in one of four possible philosophical sanctioning categories: deterrence, just deserts, incapacitation or treatment. The strength of the score in each category correlates to how strongly the individual feels about each philosophy of criminal sanctioning. Those that rank highest in the deterrence category feel that criminal sanctioning should be based on its ability to discourage future criminal activity. According to Siegel (2001), deterrence is the philosophy that the sentence or sanction received for a criminal act should be based on its ability to deter the criminal from committing future acts of crimes. In order for deterrence to be effective the

punishment must be swift, certain and severe. Those that score high in the just deserts category believe in a philosophy of justice that asserts that those that violate the law deserve to be punished commensurate with the seriousness of the crime. Just deserts sanctioning does not consider the circumstances that surrounded the offense or the background and individual characteristics of the offender. An incapacitation philosophy is the policy of locking up criminals thereby eliminating the risk of their repeating their offense while incarcerated. This approach is the safest and argues that the only way to ensure that criminal is not involved in crime is to lock them up. And lastly, a treatment response is the sentencing philosophy that supports the notion that crime is a consequence of an individual's situation including both personal traits and environmental surrounding. A premise of the treatment philosophy is that criminals and their surroundings can be treated resulting in the elimination of future criminal activity.

The O'Leary Sanctioning Exercise is an effective attitudinal instrument for identifying the criminal sanctioning orientation of individuals. Those individuals that score highest in the treatment category are more likely to prescribe to the Social Learning model. Social Learning theory maintains the idea that parole officers can support pro-social change in parolees if the officer possesses the necessary skills, competencies and orientation. Officers that possess this orientation will be more amenable to learning and utilizing the "Stages of Change" model as well as utilizing motivational interviewing skills.

The O'Leary Sanctioning exercise should be incorporated in all hiring practices for community-based corrections organizations. Those that score highest in the category of treatment should be considered the top candidates for hire. Those that score highest in

this category prescribe to the notion that individuals can change and are more likely to take a balanced approach of crime control and social service when responding to parole violators. They will be best equipped to promote pro-social changes skills in offenders because of their philosophical approach to sanctioning.

### **B. Interviewing Techniques and Strategies that assist in Identifying Individuals with Pro-Social Changes Skills**

The structured interview is one of the most effective tools at predicting the likelihood that quality candidates will be selected. According to Cavanagh (2004), the structured interview has a validity of .51 in its effectiveness at predicting future job performance. Structured interviews can yield significant information about the applicant to include intelligence, articulateness, self-confidence, affability, and ability to remain focused on a task (Cavanagh, 2004). When framing questions, the interview should contain question that allow for identification of core competencies that are specifically recommended by National Institute of Corrections. The core competencies that future employees working in community-based corrections agencies should possess include: knowledge of human behavior, ability to motivate others, interpersonal skills and critical thinking skills (Stincomb, McCampbell, Layman, 2006). The questions must be the same for all candidates while allowing the same amount of time to answer. Standardized scoring is also necessary and will increase the validity and reliability of the interview. Corrections administrators must ensure that an adequate amount of focus and energy is placed on this step. Inconsistencies or allowing the interview to become unstructured will not yield the information needed to make good selections.

In addition to identifying core competencies of potential parole agents, the structured interview should contain questions that will draw out an individual's

attitudinal orientation towards crime and criminal behaviors. Specific question should be developed that will help to identify the interviewee's philosophy of criminal sanctioning. A format should be developed that will allow for answers that will identify candidates that had a balanced orientation. These individuals are more likely to utilize parole supervision techniques that include appropriate identification and referral to treatment services, leading peer support sessions, and providing an adequate amount of structure and supervision. These are the same measures that were utilized in the officer orientation in the New Jersey ISSP model. An evaluation of that program proved that officers that utilize those techniques will have better success with helping the parolees to develop the necessary pro-social changes skill needed to successfully complete parole. A lower recidivism rate was the ultimate outcome among the parolees that were supervised by parole agents with this orientation.

The number of offenders being sent to prison and eventually paroled continues to rise. Traditionally, parolees have very weak pro-social change skills which limit their ability to successfully re-enter society. In order to aid in the parolee's development of strong pro-social change skills, their supervising parole agent needs to possess strong pro-social changes skills. Community-based corrections agencies need to do a better job of identifying and hiring these types of individuals. Utilizing attitudinal assessments such as the O'Leary Sanctioning exercise as well as utilizing structured interviewing techniques that help to identify individuals' orientation toward crime and sanctioning would greatly benefit this process. Hiring parole agents that prescribe to the Social Learning theory of crime, have a balanced approach of crime control and the social

services model and possess strong pro-social change skills will lead to more successful outcomes for the parolees and the communities they serve.



## **VI. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED CORRECTIONAL HIRING PRACTICES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

The criminal justice system in the United States continues to arrest, prosecute and incarcerate offenders at an alarming rate. Determinate sentences, mandatory minimums and habitual offender penalties compound the problem. Law changes, sentencing philosophies, and overall approaches to crime control have led to harsher approaches to crime control that has resulted in a binge of correctional control. The consequences of this approach have led to a significant increase in prison and jail admissions. Offenders face a very dismal outlook upon release. In order for parolees to be successful they must acquire pro-social change skills. Many do not have these skills and do not acquire them while incarcerated. Without these skills they will continue to commit violations of their supervision and the law and ultimately end up back in prison. Unfortunately, many parole agents do not have the skills and competencies needed to assist parolees who possess weak pro-socials change skills. They lack an understanding of the stages of change that offenders must go through to be pro-social. Without an understanding of where the offender is in the change process parole agents will not be able to help direct them to the next stage of change. Also, they may not possess the motivational interviewing skills necessary to direct parolees through the stages. They must be able to take the ex-inmate from identification of the problem to the end result of overcoming and living without the problem.

Hiring practices of community-based corrections staff have been ineffective at identifying effective employees. Hiring practices need to focus on the identification of skills and competencies that will promote pro-social change skills with offenders. An

officer that possesses a balanced approach of the crime control and social service model will be most effective when working with parolees. They also need to prescribe to the social learning theory of crime. They will be better equipped to promote pro-social change in offenders if they understand that crime is a product of learning the norms values and behaviors associated with criminal activity.

The New Jersey Surveillance and Supervision program is a clear example of a program that works. The officers, with a balanced combination of social learning and law enforcement approach, were more effective at helping offenders change which resulted in a reduction in revocations and returns to prison. The National Institute of Corrections has also provided guidelines of the core competencies that community based corrections employees need to possess to be effective. These two models promote promising practices in the area of hiring corrections staff that possess the skills, competencies and abilities to promote pro-social change in parolees. These models will serve as a guide for two necessary steps needed to identify effective staff: attitudinal assessments and structured interviews. The O'Leary Sanctioning exercise helps to determine a potential staff member's orientation to criminal sanctioning and crime. Those individual that score highest in the range of the treatment category should be considered top candidates for hire. These individuals have an orientation that favors the social learning approach to crime and crime control. Structured interviewing techniques also increase the likelihood that qualified candidates can be identified. The interview questions must be framed in a manner that will help to identify the core competencies identified and recommended by the National Institute of Corrections. The interview must also utilize standardized scoring.

In the history of the United States, the criminal justice system has never managed the number of offenders that are currently in the system. As a result, the need to identify and hire parole agents that can be effective at promoting pro-social changes in offenders is paramount. Promising practices have been identified and should be the basis for hiring practices for community-based corrections staff. Attitudinal assessments and structured interviews help to identify necessary core competencies and must be the foundation of future hiring practices.

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