

## **INNOVATIONS IN CASE MANAGEMENT IN WA INCORPORATING BEST PRACTICE AND THE WHAT WORKS LITERATURE**

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### **ADDRESS TO THE INAUGURAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE PROBATION AND COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS OFFICERS ASSOCIATION, SYDNEY 12 MARCH 1998**

Thank you for the opportunity to address this inaugural meeting of the Probation and Community Corrections Officers Association. It is not important that you agree with what I say, and I would much prefer that any seeds sown today produce lively and continuing debate. There was a time in Community Corrections in Western Australia when divergent thinking was regarded with a great deal of suspicion. Thankfully, those days are now well in the past. In my view, reasoned discourse and disagreement is not only to be welcomed, but should be actively provoked wherever possible. It is unthinkable that management could monopolise all of the good ideas which exist in our field of work. Any organisation which claims to see its staff as its primary resource should tap into their pool of talent and creativity. You are that pool.

If what I have to say challenges a few cherished perceptions of the world, that will be a positive outcome, provided that it stimulates your own further exploration of the issues. We all work in a complex environment which is notoriously short of right answers, and I hope that PACCOA can become a forum for the encouragement of constructive discussion, leading to improved standards of professional practice across the whole country.

#### **COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS AS A SOURCE OF ADDED VALUE**

My early memories of practice as a probation officer were of supervision being dominated by what passed as individual counselling, with some poorly articulated view of rehabilitating offenders being cited as the rationale. Although rehabilitation as an achievable and measurable goal had been heavily criticised overseas in the early 1970's, (most notably by the famous 1974 Robert Martinson article - "What Works - Questions and Answers about Prison Reform"), rehabilitation persisted as the primary rationale for probation and parole supervision until well into the 1980's.

In 1987, the WA Probation and Parole Service was absorbed into the Department of Corrective Services, where the then CEO was very critical of the loose philosophical underpinnings of the rehabilitation model. He was also very sensitive to increasing public disaffection with criminal justice administration. As a result, in common with many other places, WA went through a re-evaluation which led to the replacement of the Rehabilitation model with what was termed the *Justice Model* of management. Its core principles were that if Community Corrections was to be accepted by the public and the Courts as an effective alternative to imprisonment, it had to be seen as tough but fair. In practice this meant an emphasis on the enforcement of orders, with key words such as compliance and control. Personal development of offenders was not ruled out, but it took a more secondary role.

Another driving influence in the 1980's was the public sector wide moves to greater levels of corporate accountability and performance measurement. In some senses, I think that this development worldwide suited a Justice Model because it was not that hard to come up with measurable outputs - eg number of orders completed, breach rates, community work hours performed, etc. If one looks around the world at the present time, these are still predominantly the kinds of key performance indicators which one typically finds. Sadly, none of these things measure

the impact on longer term recidivism, or whether offenders are equipped with any additional skills with which to lead law abiding lives.

In a relatively short time it became clear that the Justice Model was not the answer. Its premises were no more clearly stated than those of the discredited rehabilitation model, and its critical measures of success were also equally elusive. Some Courts had also made the point that if they were only interested in compliance and control, they could achieve that without recourse to the kind of skilled intervention that they hoped probation officers could offer.

The other major result of the Justice Model was that staff felt that their skills base was devalued and they became little more than process workers. My own view since the early 1990's is that Community Corrections must be able to demonstrate that it adds some essential and unique value to the overall criminal justice process. Unless it can do so, its future is vulnerable, especially with the looming contestability and privatisation debate. Much of the past four years, since my appointment to the position of Director Community Corrections has been about describing and proving that added value.

If neither the Rehabilitation or the Justice Models have survived, then it is reasonable to ask about the intellectual parentage of whatever has replaced it. In Western Australia, I would have to say that there is a deal of reluctance to embrace a single theoretical framework, although three main currents wind their way through most of our contemporary thinking. In short the primary influences on us in the past three years have been Risk Assessment, Restorative Justice as a useful platform for formulation of case management thinking, and the body of literature generically known as *What Works*.

Some of you will be aware of a series of Conferences which have taken place in both the United Kingdom and North America to examine what works in corrections. There is another in the series in Manchester later in the year, and it is a source of immense pleasure and pride that I will be leading a delegation of more than twenty staff from Western Australia to that Conference.

Contestability should probably be added as a fourth major current. Whether or not the winds of corporatisation, privatisation, or contracting out have been felt in your State, it would be wise not to imagine that it can't or won't happen. For those who argue that this is only an issue on the agenda of conservative governments, don't lose sight of the fact that the most dramatic and far reaching Government restructuring in this part of the world took place under the New Zealand Labour Government of the late 1980's.

I submit that the message to all of us ought to be very clear; unless we are very clear about why we are in business and can demonstrate standards of excellence in what we do, we not only risk extinction but we deserve it.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Some of you might have had the opportunity of hearing Todd Clear's address to the Conference on Community Corrections in Brisbane in 1995. His paper - *Community Corrections: Principles Toward the Future* encapsulates some of the ideas with which we were grappling at that time.

A primary principle enunciated in Professor Clear's paper was that of Risk Management. He made the point very graphically that Community Corrections was about the management of the risk that offenders represent to the community's safety. The reduction of risk amongst those offenders who pose the greatest risk of reoffending should be at the core of what we do. In this thinking it makes little or no sense to concentrate on counselling or programs for low risk offenders. At the end of such interventions these offenders would still be of low risk. At worst the risk might actually

increase, especially if offenders reacted adversely to intensive interventions for which they had little or no need.

In Western Australia we had already started to think about risk management for pragmatic reasons of stretching our resources as far as possible, and ensuring we were directing them wisely. In common with other Correctional Services, Community Corrections in Western Australia has been faced with the challenge of continuing to provide effective offender supervision in an economic climate of scarce resources, together with increasing expectations to produce value for money in offender management. Consistent with Risk Assessment devices introduced in other parts of the world, the better identification and selective targeting of higher risk offenders has become a critical tool towards ensuring the most cost-effective allocation of resources, with the best hope of a positive impact on reduced rates of reoffending.

We presently operate a Risk /Needs assessment device based on one originally developed in Wisconsin, North America and modified for the Australian environment. It lacks specific validation for local conditions, but was tested against a sample of local offender files. The adapted Wisconsin model has fulfilled a transitional need during the development of a purpose-designed Western Australian model using a number of refinements not known to have been thus far replicated anywhere else in the world

The major problem of Risk Assessment instruments worldwide is that they are static rather than dynamic instruments. That is to say, they are developed at a certain point in time, using variables which are considered to correlate in some way with risk of reoffending. Even where the research has been thorough, over time the risk predictor variables do their job less well because community demographic profiles change. The problem is accentuated when one system adapts or borrows a system designed elsewhere in the world, because there is not necessarily any comprehensive validation against local data. Australian adaptations of Wisconsin or the Canadian Level of Supervision Inventory are cases in point. Up to now there has not been any Australian jurisdiction which has built a comprehensive Risk Assessment system of its own from the ground up, using extensive locally validated data.

We decided to tackle the problem with a major research project spread over almost four years with the Crime Research Centre of the University of W.A. This takes a fundamentally different approach to Risk Assessment. Starting off with the accumulated details in several separate databases - Police, Courts, Prisons, and Community Corrections - we developed a project to link all of those computer records sources, so that any individual by virtue of certain known characteristics could be matched to a cohort of others within the database. This ability to examine an individual with a cohort of 'like others' forms the basis of the actuarial assessment instrument.

The new WA project is an attempt to develop an actuarially based, computer-driven offender assessment system to predict the risk of recidivism. The innovation in this project is the creation and refinement of an 'on-line' actuarial assessment device, drawing from data on arrest, conviction and custody records in Western Australia to compute a highly accurate predictor of recidivism. This provides a cross-jurisdictional data base of somewhat more than 200,000 offender records. This, coupled with a new offender classification and case management system which gives a much clearer rationale for casework intervention methods and aims, and moves away from a more administrative, 'compliance monitoring' style of supervision, has enabled more effective use of resources in targeting the reduction of recidivism.

Some risk assessment devices use up to 50-60 offender characteristics as indices to be weighted in developing a risk inventory. The WA model has sought to identify 8-10 key characteristics which would reliably predict reoffending risk to at least 95% of accuracy. Although it is possible to add as many variables as one chooses, each new variable is likely to only have the most marginal impact

on the total scoring profile. Refinements are still being made to the WA instrument to improve its accuracy and predictive ability.

Some other models become extremely cumbersome to administer with the large number of risk variables to weight. Where risk assessment instruments are too complex or time consuming, the temptation exists for staff who are under constant work pressure, to see it not as an aid to good case planning, but as a positive hindrance. This can lead to shortcuts in administering the instrument or filling it in after the offender has left the office, neither of which are calculated to improve the reliability of the system.

Unlike most other systems, the actuarial model is able to maintain accurate risk predictions over time by comparing the key characteristics of any given individual against all other matching cells in the data base. Over time, the data base itself changes as details of each new offender are added to the system. This means that the basis for risk prediction scoring shifts incrementally over time, thereby protecting against obsolescence. It is possible to remove from the computation data of a certain age.

An accurate predictor of recidivism has considerable potential in the provision of advice to sentencing and releasing authorities. This facet will be discussed further in the workshop although the main focus of this submission is to share experiences of changes that have been undertaken in the supervision system.

At present, field trials of the system have commenced at three branches. After field trial results this year have been evaluated and adjustments made, a final implementation model will be introduced, probably by the end of 1999.

A longer term by-product of the model is likely to be much more objective measures of performance by Community Corrections. I have a view, admittedly none too popular, that most key performance indicators in offender management around the world are rubbish. We still rely heavily on measures of workload, or the number of case in a certain category (eg completions of Community Service Orders in a year compared to previous years). We all know that if the completion rate for probation or some other order changes this year, it could be for all manner of quite extraneous reasons. This could be that we toughened up on action against non-compliant offenders, so that fewer offenders completed orders. Does this say that our performance improved or declined? Unless we have high quality risk assessment and needs analysis processes, it could be that we are selecting the wrong people for the wrong kinds of supervision. Likewise, changes in completion rates could be the product of changes in legislation, different sentencing patterns in the Courts, or any of number of other variables independent of the quality of supervision.

When you have a database of several hundreds of thousands cases to draw from, then it would not be difficult in five or ten years time, or at some other interval, to do some sampling of offender risk predictions in specific cases, investigate the management regimes to which these individuals were subject, and then examine the outcomes. One could then go further and match this sample against a control group with similar characteristics, but who were not placed under community based supervision. It would then become possible for the first time to do some detailed analysis on a large scale as to the efficacy of community based supervision versus other methods of management. That could be a risky thing to do, especially if it was shown that other sentencing options produce better results but it would certainly produce far more worthwhile measures of effectiveness than anything which we have available today.

If the W.A actuarial model lives up to promise, the future of risk assessment, which is fundamental to defensible case management regimes, will almost certainly start to move away from static to dynamic models. We will have a full production model by the end of 1999.

## CORE BUSINESS OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

By 1996, we were about one year into the Risk Assessment model. That was a start to formulating a global statement of what we were uniquely equipped to do (ie no one outside Community Corrections can offer a risk assessment product which can stand up to the same level of critical scrutiny), but it was only one cog in the wheel.

In 1996 we were starting to become interested in the accumulated literature under the general description *What Works in Corrections*. The discussion of the What Works literature, combined with our knowledge of Risk Assessment led to what we called a *Refocus Review* in Community Corrections, which sought to specify exactly what was our business, and why we deemed it so. In doing that, we tried to answer several questions:

- ◆ What essential services should Community Corrections provide;
- ◆ What services are necessary, but capable of being provided by alternative suppliers;
- ◆ What services need not be provided because of their limited added value.

The Refocus report has given us a baseline for most of the critical decisions made in the past twelve months. For example, we used to contract out the writing of pre-sentence reports whenever staff were at full capacity. Under Refocus we stopped this, because we reasoned that it was inappropriate and dangerous to have such reports contracted out for the sake of convenience. We believe that high quality assessment was one of the two things which we did best, and which required the greatest level of knowledge and skill. The other is the management of high risk offenders.

Amongst other things, Refocus has helped us to redefine the nature of Case Management. If, as we know from the Risk Assessment literature, the management of low risk offenders is a non-productive use of time and energy, then there is no reason to manage those cases in the same way as higher risk offenders. Such a distinction helped us to develop a typology which differentiates between Casework Supervision and Compliance Supervision. Casework supervision applies to those offenders who are subjected to more intensive intervention due to risk ratings or other factors requiring closer monitoring by a professional Community Corrections Officer. Compliance supervision describes supervision at a lower level of intrusion which does not necessarily require the active intervention of a Community Corrections Officer, but may be managed and reported on by a sessional contractor, or some other service provider. In the latter case, the contractor must only have sufficient skills to ensure that if a compliance case is showing signs of heading for problems which require more skilled intervention, the case can revert to casework supervision.

Having determined what type of supervision is to be undertaken, under what conditions and for what reasons, one is well on the way towards knowing what kind of skills profile and workforce composition is needed. I can not pretend that in Western Australia we have resolved all of these problems as yet. We would have been well on the way, but the process was slowed down by the amalgamation last year of Community Corrections and Juvenile Justice community based services. This has added several new layers of complexity, because of the disparate industrial and staff classification characteristics of the two groups. However, we are at least well placed to deal with these problems.

Refocus also gives an intelligent basis from which to discuss issues relating to contracting out of services, or privatisation. As the Casework Supervision versus Compliance Supervision example illustrates, there must be a clearly stated rationale for everything we do, and this must be able to stand scrutiny by policy decision makers who are independent of our operations.

## **THROUGH CARE**

A comprehensive model of case management should not regard prisons and Community Corrections Centres as unrelated entities, each going their own way. We believe that integrated throughcare planning is essential, given that the population of offenders will move back and forward between custodial and non-custodial environments. We are trying to break down walls between the disparate case practices in each area, but still have some way to go.

In consequence of this view we have reintroduced Community Corrections Officers into metropolitan prisons where their role is to act as case planning consultants, and to assist prisoners and staff prepare for smooth transition to Community Corrections upon release.

## **FORMAL EVALUATION**

Historically very few programs in Community Corrections have had evaluation methodology built into program design from the beginning, although this has changed to varying degrees in the past few years. All new programs in Western Australia must be able to state from the outset what their objectives are to be, how success or failure is to be measured, what data needs to be collected to make it possible to do an effective evaluation, and how that data is to be obtained. In the past twelve months, most of our program evaluations have gone out to public tender, which removes any taint of suspicion about the lack of independence or objectivity of the evaluators.

I consider that any Community Corrections system which relies on its good reputation or its belief in being the best judge of what is appropriate is placing itself in a very fragile and unenviable position.

## **AMALGAMATION OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS AND JUVENILE JUSTICE**

The amalgamation of Community Corrections and Juvenile Justice community based services in W.A took place in February 1997. Community Corrections had not previously envisaged the amalgamation of the two groups, and our Refocus Review in 1996 was not predicated on the basis of accommodating any such major structural changes. At the same time, I believe that the work we had done on reviewing and redefining our role did assist senior policy makers to see the logic of connections which we had not canvassed.

Although the amalgamation of juvenile and adult community based services is a controversial topic in many jurisdictions, the process has been remarkably smooth. I acknowledge that there are still some staff who have philosophical problems about a combined service, and it is not for me to suggest whether other States should consider a similar path. My only objective is to share our experience and leave others to reach their own conclusions.

One of the objections to an amalgamated juvenile and adult service is that fundamentally different principles of management should apply. The requirement that juvenile justice systems promote children's welfare is enshrined in several United Nations conventions. Although these documents are sometimes held to preclude conjoint management structures for adult and juvenile offenders, I have yet to discover where any of them do so.

In Western Australia, the amalgamation has not done away with the separate roles of Juvenile Justice Officer and Community Corrections Officer, except in remote locations. What it has done is offer a range of benefits including:

- ◆ Better capacity to develop tailor made programs for the crucial 16-21 year old age group, who share many common features even though their individual maturity levels might differ. The

programs recognise maturational differences and can make adjustments as required to individual program content. We have been able to develop some highly innovative programs for this group, to the extent that one of our managers has now been invited to address a major international conference on criminology in Korea later this year.

- ◆ The removal of competing or dissonant management systems. For example, Juvenile Justice and Community Corrections both formerly used many of the same community agencies for work placements or other program related needs. Both groups operated under separate and sometimes incompatible rules, which was perplexing to the community, and undermined public confidence in the administration of offender supervision.
- ◆ Significant savings on administrative overheads by the streamlining of management structures. We have also been able to go some way towards evening out peaks and troughs in workload demands by having greater flexibility to move resources according to priorities.

To those who still see juvenile and adult management needs as totally different, we would respond that if there is an effective case management system in place, all offenders will be dealt with as individuals. It is foolish to imagine that a young juvenile offender of 11 or 12 is capable of responding to the same management regime as an adult. On the other hand it is equally shortsighted not to recognise that amongst older adolescents and younger adults there may be many valid opportunities for effective conjoint programs. Even in those case, there is likely to be a balance between common program modules and individualised attention to personal needs.

#### **PREVENTIVE AND DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS**

The next driving force for Community Based Services in this State will be the development of preventive and diversionary programs for selected adult offenders. What we found on merging with Juvenile Justice was a branch with some very exciting front-end programs. The Juvenile Justice Team concept which allows most categories of juvenile offender to be referred to a Team rather than go through the Children's Courts has produced some quite remarkable results, including Police and victim approval ratings of up to 90 per cent.

If Community Corrections is to concentrate its attentions on high risk offenders, then we should be trying to divert suitable lower risk offenders from the system, especially where our supervision can not be shown to add much value. We can foresee a graduated range of diversion options tailored to fit different circumstances, but are not yet quite to the point of seeking approval from Government to proceed from the conceptual to the implementation stage. In some areas legislative change would be required.

We have a number of other initiatives which we are working up at present, but which are some months away from completion. One is a revamp of the role of the branch managers so that they all take on some portfolio responsibilities for areas of policy development. We think that our managers would benefit from having an enlarged role, which links strategic issues to local operations. It would also get field staff more committed by the chance to participate in a range of standing committees which will delve into matters which they might not otherwise encounter.

#### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

If you take nothing else away from today, I would hope that it has been possible to present to you something of the complexity and diversity which confronts Community Corrections Officers and to encourage you to aim for the best practice standards of service. I admit that in some areas we don't yet know what best practice means, but if we believe in what we do, it is imperative that we continue to question, research and improve.

I wish the Association well as it works out how best to make its own contribution to Community Corrections practice.