

The safe return of offenders through selection, intervention and supervision

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Offender reintegration has been defined as all correctional and programming activity conducted to prepare an offender to return safely to the community as a law-abiding citizen.² Reintegration encompasses a broad range of decisions commensurate with public safety, and intended to: place offenders in the least restrictive setting possible, grant temporary absence or conditional release, and invoke suspension or revocation of conditional release when necessary.³ Therefore, safe, effective and efficient reintegration can yield fewer days spent in prison, longer periods on conditional release and reduce recidivism.

There are many opportunities, from admission to end-of-sentence, where improvement in case management activities (selection, programming, monitoring and support) has the potential to yield reintegration dividends. Based on a review of the available applied research on key offender management functions, sixteen reintegration levers were uncovered. The assumptions supporting these sixteen reintegration levers are discussed below and their potential contribution to safe reintegration is illustrated in the accompanying articles.

Correctional decision-making is the foundation on which the success of offender reintegration rests. While objective selection procedures and programming efforts have been refined and improved over the years, additional contributions to the reintegration effort can be realized by encouraging greater efficiencies across case management functions. Based on a review of operational research at least sixteen functions were identified along the case management continuum where appropriate decisions and improved efficiencies could impact on reintegration.

Reintegration Levers

1. Classifying initial security level

Initial security level placement has an impact on the probability and timing of discretionary release.⁴ Simply stated, the lower the level of initial security placement the greater the probability of discretionary release and the shorter the period of incarceration prior to release. At admission, appropriately placing offenders to the least restrictive measures of confinement contributes to the reintegration effort by increasing opportunities for gradual release, improving release credibility, eliminating the time consuming and sometimes questionable practice of security transfer reviews, and by exposing the offender to release-oriented case management teams.

2. Profiling reintegration potential

Accurate profiles of each offender's initial security level placement, release risk, programming requirement at admission⁵ and reintegration potential⁶ at admission serves as a means to predict good candidates for early release and can help to establish case preparation priorities.

3. Developing correctional plans

The correctional plan developed at intake is the foundation upon which prison release is predicated and often the basis on which discretionary release is supported or denied and often understood or have the tendency to become "binding contracts," especially when the plan is associated with a statement of reintegration potential.

4. Improving program motivation

Offenders who are highly motivated to succeed in programs represent prime candidates for successful reintegration.⁷ Motivation is often a critical factor in parole officer support for program referral, participation, progress and early release. Accurately assessing offender motivation to target offenders for program participation and to establish release priority can make an important contribution to safe reintegration.

5. Increasing program participation

Institutional program participation often consumes a large proportion of case preparation time and can become a source of delay in eventual release. Successful program participation has been demonstrated to improve the likelihood of post-release success. Assignment to programs, where the need is not identified or, the program is inappropriate, may offer little or no benefit and actually contribute to conditional release failure.

6. Ensuring program completion

Program completion is a critical foundation for the safe release of offenders. The full effects of programming are not always fully known, however, completing programs provides important information about post-release success; and program non-completers or dropouts impose a cost both in terms of wasted resources and in depriving motivated offenders program opportunities.

7. Improving program performance

The assessment of program performance although critical in the decision to support early release, is often subjective and largely without guidelines. Assessing program outcome/ treatment gain or relating program performance to reintegration potential and post-release adjustment is important.

8. Reviewing preventative detention referrals

Increasing preventative detention referrals (to be held to the end of sentence) results in longer incarceration periods. Profiles of offenders who are returned to custody following detention can be established and provide the basis for improving detention referrals.

9. Moderating administrative segregation

Placement in administrative segregation for disciplinary (such as assault) or voluntary reasons (such as protection) is a major impediment to correctional progress and early release. Profiles of offenders identified as “at risk” to be segregated provide an opportunity to develop interventions designed to divert offenders from administrative segregation and to ensure their quick discharge; effective implementation of segregation policies can prevent the segregation of some offenders and ensure the speedy release of others.

10. Reclassifying security level

Reclassification and expeditious transfer of offenders to the “least restrictive measures of confinement” can improve the offender’s chances for earlier, discretionary release. Regular and systematic reviews of security classification play an important role in the reintegration process.

11. Increasing successful temporary absences

Participation in either escorted or unescorted temporary absence programs are critical to establishing offender credibility for early release and re-establishing the temporary absence program can make a major contribution to safe reintegration.

12. Enhancing case preparation activities

Case preparation⁸ is the total of all activity designed to prepare appropriate offenders for an early safe release and manage them throughout conditional release. Achieving modest efficiencies at any one of number of critical stages along the case management continuum can result in significant reductions in “days of incarceration” and a corresponding increase in community supervision.

13. Encouraging safe community release

Participation in work release programs⁹ or other types of early release programs (such as day parole, correctional halfway house placement, program attendance centres) are critical to establishing offender credibility for full release and re-establishing the view that this type of programming can make a major contribution to safe reintegration.

14. Enhancing community supervision

The effective use of frequency of contact guidelines, special conditions and community-based programming as well as compliance to standards¹⁰ can play an important role in determining whether offenders successfully complete their conditional release.

15. Moderating suspensions

Reintegration success can also be achieved by maintaining conditionally released offenders in the community. Predicting offenders who are at greater risk for being suspended is greatly improved by use of measurement techniques. More importantly, suspension practice is subject to broad interpretation, often-reflecting local decision-making traditions and case management efficiencies that can impact on the reintegration progress. While it is unwise to prescribe an “appropriate” suspension rate (particularly in the absence of specific operational suspension criteria) improving suspension efficiencies and narrowing disparities in practice has the potential to sustain more offenders for longer periods in the community.

16. Moderating technical revocations

Technical revocations (those not based on a criminal conviction, charge or absconding from the parole jurisdiction) may provide an additional source for improving the reintegration process. There has been little study of revocation decision-making processes and guidelines could be developed to support field staff. A better understanding of the process and corporate guidelines, particularly those that support alternatives to revocation submissions, may improve reintegration efforts.

Conclusion

Clearly, the number of reintegration levers presented offer mechanisms for reductions in incarceration days and improved post-release outcomes. Within this context, the aforementioned “levers” can also contribute substantially to the integrity of custody, care, control and safe reintegration practices and the success of offender population management. ■

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- ⁵ Motiuk, L. L. (1997). Classification for correctional programming: The Offender Intake assessment (OIA) process. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9(1), 18-22. See also Taylor, G. (1998). Implementing risk and needs in the Correctional Service of Canada. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9(1), 32-35.
- ⁶ Motiuk, L. L., & Latimer, J. (1999). Young adult offenders in federal corrections: A profile. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 11(2), 12-19. See Motiuk, L. L., & Nafekh, M. (1999). Reintegration potential profiles for federally sentenced women. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 11(3), 13-17. See also Motiuk & Nafekh (2000). Aboriginal offenders in federal corrections a profile. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 12(1), 10-15 and Motiuk & Nafekh (2000). The long-term offender in federal corrections: A profile. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 12(3), 10-15.
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- ¹⁰ Luciani, F. (1994). Conditional release supervision standards revisited: An examination of compliance in Ontario region. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 6(3), 26-29.

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