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Probation, Parole, and Reentry

*According to a report of the
Office of Justice Programs,*

The reentry of serious, high-risk offenders into communities across the country has long been the source of violent crime in the United States. As more than 630,000 offenders are released from prison every year, the problem of their recidivism has become a crisis that affects all parts of a community. Fewer than half of all released offenders stay out of trouble for at least three years after their release from prison, and many of these offenders commit serious and/or violent offenses while under parole supervision.⁴⁷

In the hours and days following release from prison, former inmates are vulnerable to the trap of past behaviors. A study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) found that of 272,111 prisoners released from prison in 15 states in 1994, 67.5 percent—more than two-thirds—were rearrested within three years.⁴⁸ Prisoners may be released “at odd hours of the night” and without appropriate identification.⁴⁹ In a nationwide survey conducted by the American Correctional Association in 2000, two-thirds of the states reported that they did not provide any documentation or reporting instructions to inmates upon release.⁵⁰ Releasees may be given nothing more than a bus ticket and some pocket money and sometimes not even that.⁵¹ They may have substance abuse problems that may or may not have been treated in prison. According to BJS, in 2000 fewer than one-third of the prisoners received needed drug abuse treatment.⁵²

Ex-offenders face many obstacles as they look for employment. Many businesses are unwilling to hire people with a criminal record. According to a report on prisoner reentry published by the Urban Institute in 2003, “Job training and placement programs show promise in connecting ex-prisoners to work, thereby reducing their likelihood of further offending. Yet, fewer inmates are receiving in-prison vocational training than in the past and fewer still have access to transitional programs that help connect them to jobs in the community.”⁵³ Many inmates have inadequate education and incomplete job experience. They may already be difficult to employ in the poor job markets of the impoverished areas to which they usually return, and adding a felony conviction makes it much harder. In addition, housing is often a problem when offenders have become estranged from their families and also may not be permitted in public housing.

All of these factors make it crucial that releasees receive assistance dealing with the challenges of reentry.

Tracking and Monitoring Young Ex-offenders

An initiative targets high-risk young offenders (17 to 34) to help them with reentry.

PROBLEM Many ex-offenders leave prison with no job prospects and no money, support system, or adequate housing. They are at risk of reoffending when they return to their neighborhoods.

PROGRAM The Boston Re-entry Initiative (BRI) is a partnership between the Boston Police Department and the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department that also involves the collaborative efforts of social service providers, other law enforcement agencies, and faith-based organizations—the Ella J. Baker House, Bruce Wall Ministries, the Nation of Islam, and the Ten-point Coalition (see page 33). The BRI targets 17- to 34-year-old inmates who are considered high risk for continuing their involvement in crime. Most of the offenders selected have extensive criminal backgrounds, histories of violence, firearm offenses, and gang associations. In addition, they come from—and will probably return to—communities designated as high-crime areas. The BRI seeks to prevent these young people from reoffending by offering them comprehensive and effective transitional resources and by carefully monitoring their reentry process.

The Boston Police Department's Gang Intelligence Unit identifies high-risk offenders as they are entering the prison (Suffolk County House of Correction). The unit recommends 15 to 20 inmates per month for the program. Program participants develop a "transition accountability plan" that outlines whatever treatment and rehabilitation is needed. The inmates attend a panel session with representatives from law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, where the message is fair and balanced with social service, faith, and law enforcement messages. Each panel member speaks from his or her own perspective: faith-based and social service organizations, for example, talk about resources and support available while the inmates are in prison and after their release, while law enforcement speaks about the consequences of reoffending. The overall impact of these sessions is to diminish the inmates' sense of anonymity and to help them understand that they have the power to choose not to return to criminal behavior.

After the panel session, inmates are assigned caseworkers and faith-based mentors who meet with them while they are still incarcerated. Education, substance abuse, and other rehabilitative programs are part of the transitional accountability plan. On release, a family member or a mentor meets the person at the door. Mentors and caseworkers continue to assist ex-offenders with immediate issues such as IDs, driver's licenses, health insurance, shelter, transportation, clothing, etc. The ex-offenders are encouraged to continue these relationships during the reentry period, and they are tracked and monitored after their release.

ROLE OF FAITH All of the faith-based organizations are in the neighborhoods to which the offenders return. This provides additional credibility for the program. Religion is not a factor in selecting program participants but sometimes plays a role in matching mentors and participants.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES Funding for this work is scarce. This program requires extensive coordination and cooperative work, which may not be possible in all jurisdictions.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS This program is strongly supported by the mayor, the police commissioner, the sheriff, and many religious leaders in Boston. The partnership has led to the creation of a very successful juvenile reentry program with the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, as well as a small pilot Federal Re-Entry Program, under federal supervision.

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Ex-offender Eldercare Teams

A faith-based organization employs ex-offenders to provide social services for elderly residents of public housing.

PROBLEM Former offenders have trouble finding employment within the community.

PROGRAM Ex-offenders are hired to work on Care Teams that provide services for senior citizens in public housing. They escort them on trips to the bank or the store, make home visits, and assist them with errands. Faith-based partners in Cleveland, OH—the ecumenically sponsored Community Re-Entry (CR) program and its administrative agency, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry (LMM)—developed the program to address two community problems: ex-offenders' difficulty in finding employment and the vulnerability of elderly public housing residents. Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), which has its own police force, agreed to this new approach to increasing the safety of residents. The collaboration won funding from local foundations, United Way, and CMHA.

Community Re-Entry worked closely with CMHA residents, the local advisory council, police, and management to explain how Care Teams would serve the residents and at the same time be a life-changing ministry for the ex-offenders. Board members from the Episcopal, United Methodist, Catholic, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, and Lutheran faiths were part of the process and provided additional credibility.

Ex-offenders for the program are carefully selected and must not have a history of violent or sexual offences. They must pass drug tests and receive conflict mediation training and an orientation to the work site. New employees shadow experienced employees before they are considered for a full-time, more independent position. The Care Teams are carefully supervised and monitored, and there is immediate follow-up if there are any problems or concerns.

Through the Care Teams program, 40 full- or part-time former offenders serve more than 500 Cleveland residents of public housing.

ROLE OF FAITH Faith is an important motivation for board members and many of the staff of LMM and CR, but it is not required, and evangelizing is not permitted.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES Putting ex-offenders in close relationships with vulnerable elderly people is a challenge, and it may be difficult to get acceptance for the idea—the community, prospective funders, and even the intended recipients themselves may be skeptical and with some justification. Ex-offender participants must be carefully screened and trained, and any concerns must be addressed immediately. Careful monitoring is essential. It helps if the agency or group implementing the program is already known and respected in the community, as was the LMM/CR partnership.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS The recidivism rate for active Care Team members has averaged less than five percent for the 25 years of the program.⁵⁴ CMHA residents rely on the services. Each year they use 7,500 escorted trips, 12,000 shopping or banking runs, 14,000 home visits, and 20,000 building safety checks.

A 1988 evaluation by CMHA (the primary funder) found the following results:

- During the first six months of the program at Lakeview and Cedar estates, there was a 50 percent reduction in residents' complaints.
- The residents of all the participating buildings overwhelmingly responded that they want this "very vital service" to continue.
- The aspect residents liked most about the Care Team members was "the sense of security they brought about."
- On a scale of one to ten (best), respondents' answers to the question "How would you rate the overall performance of the Care Team?" averaged nine.

The CMHA evaluation observed that the Care Teams "have been effective in changing the quality of life for our residents in a most positive manner. In addition, services they render are invaluable and would be sorely missed if discontinued."

TIPS FOR APPLYING THE STRATEGY

It is important to address the following key questions during program design:

- What previous offenses will disqualify a participant?
- How will service delivery disputes be handled?
- In what way does being faith-based affect the program, and are all parties comfortable with that?
- Where does the initial funding come from, and what is the outlook for sustainability?
- How will media relations be handled initially and in the event of any adverse events?
- What level of achievement will indicate success, and what level will indicate a need for improvement? How will they be measured?
- How will the concept be presented to service staff, residents, and other community stakeholders?
- How will we involve others in the faith community through volunteers, donations, advocacy, or other action?

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Moment-of-release Contract

Members of the faith community help prisoners plan for their return to the community.

PROBLEM Prisoners face many barriers when they are released, such as limited housing and employment options, lack of vital papers, etc. They need help dealing with these difficulties and reintegrating into the community.

PROGRAM Exodus Transitional Community, Inc. (ETC), is a faith-based organization that works with men and women released from New York State correctional facilities. Located in East Harlem in New York City, ETC was founded in 1999 by clergy, volunteers, and ex-offenders. Volunteers make contact with returning offenders within the first 24 hours of release. They may pick up the inmate from the correctional facility or provide transportation to the aftercare center. Volunteers help releasees make critical decisions about their future, write a service plan, and make an “ETC contract” to keep them accountable to the plan. The contract commits the ex-offender to actions to reduce recidivism such as drug rehabilitation, relapse prevention measures, anger man-

agement classes, job training and placement, empowerment strategies for women, academic counseling, computer literacy, family relationship building, HIV/AIDS support groups, as well as education on housing, voting, employment rights, and health insurance.

ETC's assessment tool and action plan enable participants to evaluate their progress in each of the following areas: education, employment, family, community, spirituality, and health. Participants use self-evaluation to formulate goals and to assess areas where they need more support. Through the contract they begin to take control of their lives and to connect with a network of caring individuals, many of whom are ex-offenders who have successfully reintegrated. The volunteers provide or connect ex-offenders to programs and services to correspond to each component of the moment-of-release contract.

ETC also provides aftercare services. Housing is a major problem for ex-offenders. Public housing, Section 8 housing, and other federally assisted housing programs are denied to certain offenders, such as those convicted of drug-related crimes. In addition, households with members who are sex offenders or were convicted of methamphetamine production in public housing are permanently denied public housing. This means that ex-offenders may not be able to move in with their families.⁵⁵ Sometimes their only option is to reside in an overcrowded and unsafe homeless shelter depriving them of important family support. ETC does not have a housing facility, but staff work with participants to link them to housing programs throughout the city. In many cases, family members and friends work with ETC to help ex-offenders identify goals, access resources, and network with a support system.

ROLE OF FAITH ETC was founded by seminarians, formerly incarcerated men and women, and a coalition of churches. Congregations have continuously funded and supported the organization. ETC is housed in the Church of the Living Hope, a United Church of Christ congregation in Manhattan. The Living Hope chapel is available to ETC participants every weekday morning for personal contemplation. Through many of its services, participants are asked to look at the role of faith in their lives. ETC believes that faith is essential for people in transition and that having a spiritual base—whether or not it is rooted in traditional religion—is essential to successful reintegration.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES Volunteers will need support and encouragement as they assist ex-offenders through this difficult transition.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS ETC staff report a 20 percent recidivism rate for clients who come through the program—less than one-third of that reported in the 1994 study mentioned above.⁵⁶ ETC empowers traditionally unrecognized leaders by employing a staff of formerly incarcerated individuals. ETC's National Leadership Initiative gives a voice to ex-offenders and increases awareness of the need for postincarceration transitional programs. ETC has assisted more than 1,200 released men and women in transition.

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Notification Sessions for High-risk Ex-offenders

In a mandatory meeting for ex-offenders on probation or parole, clergy and law enforcement officers offer reentry services and present a strong antiviolence message.

PROBLEM The reentry of serious, high-risk offenders into communities across the country has long been a source of violent crime in the United States.

PROGRAM Mandatory Notification Sessions for high-risk ex-offenders combine notice of tough enforcement of the laws with the promise of free, community-based services. Clergy and law enforcement officers on the Clergy Community Coordination project attend quarterly sessions that include representatives from the drug abuse prevention coalition, parents, educators, lay leaders, and mental health providers. About 25 ex-offenders attend each session. Clergy are recruited by the Center for Community Safety at Winston-Salem State University in Winston-Salem, NC.

At Notification Sessions, ex-offenders learn

- The community and the authorities know where they are.
- The community and the authorities are watching.
- Reentry services are free and available.
- Violence will not be tolerated.
- The consequences of violence and other crimes will be swift and severe.

Clergy also serve on Operation Reach teams with law enforcement officers and service providers. They visit the homes of youth who have attended Notification Sessions or who have otherwise been identified as at-risk of future violence. Team members talk with the kids about their concerns, encourage them to stay in school, and assess family issues that may contribute to delinquent behavior. The teams “take to the streets” to visit areas with high levels of drug traffic. They hand out literature about treatment programs and crisis hot-lines and tell the kids about project Fresh Start. This job placement and training program offers a small stipend for juvenile offenders ages 17 to 21 who attend job training classes and accept mentoring from a volunteer from the faith community.

ROLE OF FAITH The Center for Community Safety has been a leader in creating collaborations between the faith community and the criminal justice system. It is funded by a \$1.8 million, five-year grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. This university-based program employs a clergy/community coordinator to recruit members of the faith community. According to Clergy/Community Coordinator Dr. Linda Beal,

The clergy [do] the work because it impacts all of us. The church is the bastion of the community and [the community] is mandated to support it. [The church] has helped more kids in our community stay out of trouble than any other institution—even more than the criminal justice system! It's the greatest institution around for making meaningful change in a young person's life. This is why we are bringing clergy to the front end of service. They are here now to do the prevention work and the immediate follow-up after a former offender has reentered the community. Clergy won't be left out of this process any longer.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES Combining a message from law enforcement with a caring message from clergy is not always easy. Each party must support the other's message and consistently follow through on promises of services and threats of punishment. Recruiting clergy can be a challenge, especially when a diverse, multicultural, and interracial coalition is sought. It is important to build trust between religious leaders and law enforcement.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS Notification Sessions and other “lever-pulling meetings” (law enforcement officers “pull every lever” to ensure severe consequences for continued violence) have been taking place in cities all over the country, including Boston, MA; Indianapolis, IN; and Newark, NJ. Thousands of probationers and parolees have attended these meetings. In Winston-Salem, the Clergy Community Coordination project has created a formal mechanism for partner groups to come together to coordinate efforts and has increased information-sharing between neighborhood groups and the police. Respect and trust between clergy and law enforcement has improved, particularly among those who had previously had poor relationships. The involvement of faith-based partners through the Center for Community Safety is showcased in the U.S. Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods: America's Network Against Gun Violence.

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Job Placement for Ex-offenders

A carpentry shop provides permanent jobs, competitive wages, career tracks, and ownership opportunities for ex-offenders.

PROBLEM Ex-offenders returning to the community face many obstacles as they look for employment especially in the poor job markets of the impoverished areas to which they usually return and with their generally inadequate job skills and qualifications.

PROGRAM HIS Carpentry Shop, a Christian nonprofit, employs former offenders from Maine's jails and prisons to manufacture unfinished furniture. Income from furniture sales is the funding mechanism for the program, which teaches job and life skills. Under the auspices of Set Free in Maine, HIS Carpentry Shop provides permanent jobs, competitive wages, career tracks, and ownership opportunities for ex-offenders and disadvantaged people.

Program directors and the organization contact prerelease programs at jails and prisons, seeking referrals from social workers, chaplains, prison guards, and even other inmates. Once potential participants are identified, mentors work with the prisoners three to six months before their release, providing a spiritual support community, substance abuse treatment referrals, and help with housing.

The business is self-sustaining, and the sponsoring congregation doesn't have to seek grants or public funds. The profits go to fund employee scholarships, transitional housing, and a multiservice center to serve this population. Ex-offenders earn enough to support themselves while they learn transferable life and job skills. The program is supplemented with housing assistance, opportunities for fellowship, spiritual enlightenment, and guidance. Members of the sponsoring congregation help offenders put together a life plan.

ROLE OF FAITH When members of the Set Free in Maine congregation decided to develop a program to serve prisoners, staff and volunteers at the local prison told them that what was needed was not another Bible study. "They saw practical Christianity (walking the walk, not just talking the talk) as the greatest need and desire of the inmates they were working with," according to Pastor Kenneth Stevens. "If you want a clear picture of the role of faith in the development of this program, refer to the book of Nehemiah [in the Bible]. Nehemiah—the wall builder—has been our guide. We are working on the broken down walls of human life."

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES The labor costs for HIS Carpentry Shop are double the normal manufacturing costs because the program uses unskilled labor. The program needs support and advice from a strong board of business professionals, and it needs to have a business plan that takes into account these additional costs. Although foundations are increasingly interested in funding social entrepreneurial ventures such as this one, many are reluctant to invest in businesses that hire ex-offenders.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS The program is self-sustaining. HIS Carpentry Shop also wholesales furniture back to community organizations for their fundraising efforts, collects and distributes food donated by local congregations, and donates scrap wood from the shop to low-income families to heat their homes in the harsh Maine winters. Set Free in Maine used profits from HIS Carpentry Shop to open the Dream Center, a multiservice transitional facility for ex-offenders and substance abusers. As a result of the program's success, the Maine Department of Corrections has asked the congregation to set up a statewide mentoring program for all returning offenders.

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Prison Aftercare Ministry

Faith-based prerelease and aftercare mentors provide a support system for offenders on parole.

PROBLEM Ex-offenders often lack a support system to help them reenter the community.

PROGRAM In 1993 St. James' Episcopal Church, a small congregation in Montgomery County, MD, began the Prison Aftercare Ministry program with six volunteers who were committed to preventing offender recidivism. Today the ministry includes up to 20 or more volunteers from seven area churches. These volunteers, who are laypeople, are trained to be "aftercare ministers" who help inmates at the Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF) build more constructive lives after their release from prison. There are approximately 700 inmates at the MCCF, both men and women. Most are serving sentences of 18 months or fewer. Those serving longer sentences usually go to state or federal prisons. To be selected for the program, an inmate must indicate a desire to participate and must be recommended by the chaplain or a counselor.

The program is modeled after the Stephen Ministry, a national organization with a well-structured peer support network that trains Christian laypeople in caregiving and crisis counseling. Aftercare ministers must complete the intensive training program—nine evening classes and one weekend retreat incorporating religious exercise and instruction in the needs of former inmates. Volunteers, who commit to two years of service, are matched with inmates at the MCCF and meet weekly while the inmates still have three or four months

to serve. After the inmates' release, weekly meetings continue for up to six months or longer.

The weekly meetings establish a relationship of trust. The volunteer encourages the inmate to make plans for after his or her release. Volunteers are trained to be good listeners and to understand the challenges faced by inmates with alcohol or drug addiction. They can provide helpful information on treatment options in the community and advice about sources of aid in finding a job, the importance of meeting parole requirements, etc.

Aftercare ministers also attend two-hour continuing education meetings twice a month. One hour is spent in peer counseling and one hour in listening to a guest speaker such as a probation officer, an alcohol or drug rehabilitation counselor, or the warden or another staff member from the MCCF.

ROLE OF FAITH Faith is important to this ministry. The program is church based and rooted in the Christian tradition. All the volunteers are Christians who believe that helping others is an important part of their faith. Operating costs, which are minimal, are provided by the supporting churches. The training and continuing education meetings are held in church buildings, and the churches also contribute office supplies and clerical work when needed.

After the inmate leaves prison, the weekly meetings continue. Eventually the volunteer will suggest that the ex-offender consider attending church, and he or she will invite the person to visit the volunteer's church some Sunday. Mainly, however, volunteers encourage ex-offenders to visit churches on their own.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES Corrections officers were skeptical at first but became supportive and cooperative when they saw that the volunteers were dependable and were primarily interested in helping inmates rather than converting them. The program also benefited from a Montgomery County correctional culture that emphasizes rehabilitation and the reduction of recidivism. The aftercare ministry has the support of the Montgomery County director of corrections and rehabilitation and the corrections staff at both the county jail and the county prerelease center. Volunteers are issued permanent visitor badges so that they can go directly to the inmate's cell, rather than visiting through a window.

Drug and alcohol addiction is a significant obstacle for some ex-offenders as they try to rebuild their lives. Volunteers are trained to understand the powerful pull of alcohol and drugs and the importance of attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and they urge an addicted person to attend these meetings. Volunteers often will offer to drive people to the first meeting. Volunteers are taught that relapse is a common experience on the road to recovery and that an ex-offender who slips back into addiction is not beyond recovery.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS The St. James' Aftercare Ministry has trained 35 volunteers who have mentored close to a hundred or more ex-offenders since 1993.

St. James' has also developed publications and videos on three aspects of the aftercare program: the importance of aftercare ministry, how to be a good listener, and how to counsel ex-offenders dealing with substance abuse. Each video comes with a booklet of course notes. These training materials were developed by St. James' with financial assistance from the Ruth Gregory Soper Memorial Fund of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, DC. For more information about these training materials, contact www.edow.org/stjamespotomac, or call the number listed below.

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Circles of Support and Accountability for Sex Offenders

A microcommunity of service providers, clergy, and volunteers from the faith community supervise sex offenders when they are released from prison.

PROBLEM Many states require sex offenders to serve their entire sentence in prison and also place their names on the sex offender registry. Consequently, former sex offenders are often released from prison with neither supervision nor community support and are immediately identified by angry community members and the media. They may also be barred from public housing and the traditional support systems available to others. This increases the possibility of recidivism.

PROGRAM In 1994, in response to community concerns, a grassroots movement was initiated by an inner-city pastor in Ontario to bring together volunteers from area congregations to form a small community to supervise and assist ex-offenders when they are released. This primarily volunteer-driven initiative is supported by the chaplaincy branch of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Professionals from a wide background help train community members to form these networks of supervision and support.

Participants may request entry into the program or they may be referred by parole or probation officers, law enforcement, institutional chaplains, community chaplains, family members, or other concerned citizens.

Sponsoring congregations and community organizations bring together lay volunteers to be part of a Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA). Each local initiative has a coordinator, often a leader from the faith community, who will provide aspects of the training. Most projects require at least one part-time

coordinator to administer the program. The approximately 40-hour training course also serves as a screening process. Volunteers can drop out at any time during the training process, but they are asked to make a one-year commitment once they start working with an ex-offender, who is called the “core member.” Once the circle group is formed and trained, a core member is assigned.

Circles of Support and Accountability meet weekly and begin with prayer if the group chooses to do so. Each group member provides an update of happenings in terms of his or her relationship with the core member, and the core member talks about the week’s activities and frustrations. Members praise successes, challenge where challenge is needed, offer guidance when necessary, and determine further courses of action. A calendar of activities is developed around the core member’s needs. In addition, volunteers spend time with the core member, inviting him or her to participate in family activities and church functions if they feel comfortable doing so and if the activities are within the plan of action. The volunteers provide a relationship with the core member that includes “covenanting, meeting, and walking one-on-one daily.”

Community partners reapply for funding annually from the CSC.

ROLE OF FAITH This strategy builds on existing social outreach projects of religious groups. “A unique feature of [COSAs] is that they are community-‘owned’ initiatives driven by community-based volunteers. . . . Faith groups often have a natural supply of volunteers: their volunteers represent a broad skill-base and have experience working with marginalized people. Having offenders experience this caring community is vital to the success of [COSA].”⁵⁷

Although COSAs for the most part are faith based, they are not necessarily religious or driven by religious groups. Churches sometimes sponsor these groups as an extension of their ministry in a community, and sometimes faith-based agencies, such as the Salvation Army or the Mennonite Central Committee, sponsor the work. When a faith-based agency is the sponsor, it is not connected with a single congregation.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES There may be considerable community opposition if the program is perceived as being solely for the benefit of sex offenders as there is strong feeling about this particular type of crime. The community is more likely to be supportive if the program is presented as a way to protect the community by preventing these offenders from repeating their crimes. Some volunteers may feel that they are unable to participate in this particular program while others believe that their faith teaches that no one is beyond redemption.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS The program’s goal is to prevent the ex-offender from causing more harm to the community, and a person who is rehabilitated and accepted into the community is less likely to re-offend. Through the leadership of Rev. David Molzahn, the program has been instituted nationally. There are several ongoing evaluations that indicate very promising results with one of the studies indicating that participation in COSAs reduces recidivism by these ex-offenders by as much as 70 percent.⁵⁸

Probation, Parole, and Reentry

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