

Continuity of Care / Treatment SOMB

Director's Comments

6/25/14

I attended a Sex Offender Management Board Meeting yesterday on The Continuity of Treatment. The meeting addressed issues around how many times a person convicted of a sexual offense should have to take and re-take certain sex offense specific classes, what happens when someone moves from probation and treatment to incarceration and treatment, and then perhaps from incarceration and treatment to parole and treatment. There is impressive literature today showing that over-treating low risk persons with a sexual offense actually increases recidivism rather than decreasing it. The ease with which a person moves from one segment of the system to another either assists them in moving forward, or makes it less likely that they will succeed.

The "good" treatment programs are reviewing what paperwork they get when someone enters their part of the system, and doing assessments to determine what, in previous treatment, has been internalized by the person with the offense, in order to limit repetitive and unnecessary treatment classes. These good programs realize that boredom, despair regarding ever being done, financial and time concerns, getting on with life concerns, effect whether someone may recidivate sexually or with some other kind of offense.

Jeff Geist of CDOC Parole, suggested, and said that he had shared with his supervisors, the idea of CDOC actually having a "re-entry center". Because I work with a team of folks who do the hands-on work of re-entry every day, it is pretty clear to me that a CDOC re-entry center will not do the job that needs to be done.

I love working alongside parole and treatment to accomplish the massive task at hand, i.e. the rehabilitation and restoration of peoples' lives. This document is not meant to be a criticism of what is currently being done. It is meant, however, to be an analysis of why the current approach and attitude is not working. I have been waiting for several months now for a meeting with CDOC leadership and CDOC parole leadership specifically, to discuss some of these issues. That meeting continues to be promised, but has not been forthcoming. I recognize that people in the prison business have hefty schedules to meet, perhaps beyond what we can even begin to understand. However, it will be a massive strategic failure if we embrace the idea of a vast re-entry center or some other similar high cost "answer" and do not include the fulfillment of the desperate daily needs of the re-entry population that high paid staff are currently NOT DOING.

Consider what a person on parole has to comply and/or contend with on a daily basis the minute they leave incarceration.

- a) An at least once daily call (30 – 45 minute wait for someone to answer) to C-wise, the "case management system" for those on parole from CDOC.
- b) Extremely limited or non-existent funds to meet even the basic needs of living. If a person has no support, and has or doesn't have the \$100.00 one time gift from CDOC to start out with, they can be considered the poorest of the poor from day one on the ground.

- c) A person new to parole may have only the shirt on his/her back, as is evidenced by a woman who recently left Denver Womens' Correctional Facility. She had a t-shirt and a pair of beige pants, a DOC sweatsuit, one set of underwear and her CDOC issue tennis shoes and a pair of sandals.
- d) A person new to parole likely has no phone, unless the person paroled to one of the cockroach/bedbug ridden motels on east or west Colfax Avenue. They generally are vouchered to these skid row hell holes for a couple of weeks – if they beg or have special health problems, they may be allowed to stay a month before they are pushed out the door. Implications: someone has to supply them with a phone. While they can make C-wise calls from a pay phone at no cost, it often means hiking blocks, if not miles, to find one of the few pay phones still left on the streets today, only to stand there for ½ hour to 45 minutes waiting for someone from C-wise to answer.
- e) While food banks abound, new sexual offense parolees are extremely limited in terms of where they can go. A basic itinerary for these folks includes: parole, UA/BA facility, a mental health evaluation facility and treatment. This leaves out GROCERIES, LAUNDRY, HAIRCUTS, PHONE SERVICE START-UP, A CLOTHING BANK, THRIFT STORE ACCESS FOR JUST THE BARE ESSENTIALS TO SET UP MEDIOCRE HOUSEKEEPING, ETC. You get the idea.
- f) The reason for the delay in being able to visit these kinds of places is that the person on parole will not get into a treatment program for three to four weeks at least. Because Safety Plans have to be initiated by treatment, and they are necessary in order for the parolee to go to any of the above listed places, they are pretty much told to “stay in place” until they have their 1) treatment interview, 2) treatment intake, 3) treatment orientation, and 4) at last a chance to start writing and turning in safety plans. Then the plan has to be “staffed” by the treatment team which is done only on a certain day of the week. Once it is staffed, it may then take from 3 days to another week for the parole officer to get the plan that has been okayed by treatment, okay it themselves, and get word back to the person on parole. This keeps people from: job hunt, food bank visits, setting up phone service for mandatory daily calls, clothing bank stops etc.
- g) While some parole officers leave supportive and quick answers to parolee questions left on C-wise, others do not. Frequently, questions are not answered. In some cases, when questions are answered, they are only half answered, or are answered in a cryptic or “short” way, leaving the parolee to wonder what exactly they are supposed to do.
- h) Lawful orders signed by the person on parole the first day they are out are not always up to date in terms of what is required and not required, and /or parole officers sometimes choose to overlook certain requirements that are listed. This again leaves the person on parole in a quandary i.e. the lawful order says “you must have a landline”; parole officer says “in spite of what you read and signed, don't worry about it”. This puts the parolee in a very precarious position.
- i) The blessed people on parole who have family support or other support, can rely to some extent on family and friends to help them through the tough first few weeks and months. Those without family and support rely on whoever they can get to listen to them about what their needs really are. That is where private not-for-profit groups come in. Parole is, in some situations, recognizing the powerful role these groups can play in restoration/rehabilitation of persons with a sexual offense and other offenses. We are being asked more and more to assist parole and treatment with the daily needs of those with sexual offenses. That means our cars are full of garage sale and thrift store furniture, kitchen supplies (did you ever stop to think about what it takes to be able to cook and eat something – ie spatula, frying pan, saucepan, potholder or at least a kitchen towel, sharp knife, silverware). If a person can't access the grocery store, non-profits and volunteers are supplying food, cell phones, phone cards, clothing,

cooking utensils, bath towels, blankets either out of their own pockets or on the \$2,000 to \$5,000 budgets of their organizations.

- j) It takes a lot of gas to get back and forth across town to the motels and apartments that house these folks, again a sacrifice in terms of dollars and car depreciation on the part of those helping out with the tasks that RE-ENTRY does not. Bringing on more professional, well paid re-entry workers does not solve the problem of how the actual hands –on work gets done. The personal touch that is needed for peoples’ day to day survival will not happen through the doors or at the hands of re-entry, even a “souped-up” re-entry center that is open 24 hours a day. This is because the kind of work that gets people going for daily survival will never be done by high paid social workers. It is done by people with a real heart for the survival and restoration of people who need a second chance and hands-on help getting around the next curve and over the next bump.

Hopefully, this document, which will be on the CSOR Website, as well as in the hands of CDOC administrators and parole directors, will spur people to action in terms of resolving some of these issues before some costly plan is laid in stone, and those of us doing the real “hands-one” work of rehabilitation and restoration for little pay or no pay will be left out in the cold along with the people that need to be restored.

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