



Proactive Community Supervision

A Second Chance for Community Corrections and Supervisees^{1*}

by Judith **Sachwald** and Ernest **Eley, Jr.**

The Maryland Division of Parole and Probation (MDPP) is in the process of transforming itself and the way we supervise the populations under our jurisdiction. The changes are more than cosmetic adjustments in the boxes of an organizational chart or routine updates to longstanding policies. The changes are fundamental and comprehensive; they affect all of us and everyone with whom we work.

Almost every MDPP team member has played a part in this change effort, whether as leaders in the implementation of the Proactive Community Supervision (PCS) strategy, as participants of training in the principles and practices upon which this strategy is built or as constructive critics pushing us to find better methods for translating science into practice. PCS is a carefully conceived approach which incorporates empirical evidence with what our intuition and common sense were already telling us about managing supervisees. It is based on scientific study and research that demonstrates there are tools and techniques that can make a noticeable difference in the lives of those under supervision and by extension, the lives of those they encounter.

The confirmation that PCS is promising was presented to us in February 2006 by the University of Maryland and Virginia Commonwealth University. Their study of Maryland's four PCS pioneer areas¹⁷ found that the application of the philosophy and procedures which characterize PCS had a measurable and substantial impact on the success of supervisees, as evidenced by a greater than one-third reduction in new arrests and technical violations (Taxman, Yancey, and Bilanin, 2006).

The lessons we have learned from PCS transcend PCS as a supervision strategy. They have expanded beyond the boundaries of a specific initiative to become an essential part of all that we do. From modifying our chain of command policy to revising our supervision manual and making it available to employees on an intranet site to the introduction of automated reporting and case notes systems; from developing a new supervision plan format to revising supervisory review procedures, we are in the process of aligning our activities and resources with practices that will help us to achieve our mission.

Offices operating under the PCS strategy have developed working environments that are conducive to change through continuous learning and organizational development. Input and ownership are sought from every level of the organization. Quarterly town hall meetings are conducted in the PCS offices to obtain feedback from team members on all aspects of PCS implementation. A team approach to resolving issues is encouraged. Candid debate and discussion based on data is valued.

We have recognized that no program or strategy, however effective, can be expected to forever meet all the challenges of community supervision. We cannot turn back now from an awareness that the stability and comfort of tradition is an unacceptable justification for continuing along paths that do not lead us toward our goals. Our needs, and those of the communities we serve, are constantly shifting and evolving and we must evolve as

well. We must constantly monitor and analyze our efforts to confirm their continued effectiveness. We must always remain flexible and open to refining our policies and procedures on the basis of our growing knowledge and experience.

Supervision Practices Based on Science

What do we think we are doing? A question was asked at a meeting not long ago in regard to the extensive changes underway throughout MDPP. We think we are doing what must be done to enhance the health, economic vitality and safety of our communities and—by working together as a highly motivated, well-prepared and fully committed team—to encourage and assist supervisees to re-enter our communities as law-abiding and contributing residents. Community corrections agencies may be part of the criminal justice system but to really succeed they must embrace education, treatment, housing, transportation and economic development programs and services.

We think that to accomplish this and to play a part at all in helping people to alter the course of their lives, we must make every effort to understand their lives. We have to pay attention to them. We have to acknowledge them as individuals and attempt to identify the unique circumstances and problems that influence their behavior. We think our job is not to count the things we do, but to do the things that count. We think that if we focus our attention precisely where it is needed and apply our energy and resources to those needs, we can make a difference in the lives of both the people we supervise and the people we serve.

FIGURE 1
MARYLAND MODEL



MISSION

The Division of Parole
and Probation will
ensure the safety of
its employees and
enhance public safety
by holding supervisees
accountable to victims
and the community
and by helping
supervisees through the
process of becoming
law abiding and
productive.

In the mid 1990s, MDPP introduced a series of well intended community corrections programs designed to divert offenders from incarceration and to reintegrate them into the community. From a careful assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of these various efforts, MDPP learned important lessons. It became apparent that something more than compartmentalized innovation was required if the agency was to have the kind of substantial impact on recidivism that it sought. Therefore, over the past several years, MDPP has been making fundamental refinements in its practices, with emphasis on enhancing the role that the agency plays in engineering change – change focused primarily on the successful transformation of supervisees into productive members of the community, but ultimately requiring the transformation of the agency itself.

PCS is a comprehensive, community-based approach to supervision which seeks to increase public safety by holding supervisees accountable to their victims and the communities in which they live and by helping supervisees to become responsible and productive members of their communities. It is a balanced approach which has included substantial expansion of MDPP's Warrant Apprehension Unit and partnerships with law enforcement and criminal justice agencies. PCS acknowledges that for a community supervision agency to be effective it must work with and within the communities it serves.

Under traditional supervision, most interactions between agents and supervisees occur in an office environment, which isolates both the agents and supervisees from the people and experiences that actually affect them. The PCS approach enables parole and probation agents to spend more of their time in the neighborhoods in which supervisees live, thus providing agents with greater exposure to those elements of the supervisee's world which exert the strongest influence. A greater presence in the community may contribute to supervisees feeling that they are being more closely watched and more importantly, it contributes to the agents' familiarity with supervisees and a better understanding of the factors contributing to their criminal behavior.

In place of formulaic supervision practices, PCS emphasizes a simple and eminently logical approach: using the best tools available, agents attempt to determine what factors cause a supervisee to engage in criminal activity; then, using the resources available, they address those factors in order to reduce the supervisee's potential for further criminal activity. Through the use of effective interviewing and intervention skills and scientifically developed assessment instruments, PCS agents facilitate the change process by identifying and encouraging the offender to recognize those issues that influence the supervisee's behavior. Through productive contacts driven by the motivational interviewing skills the agents have been trained to employ, supervisees are steadily encouraged to make a commitment to increasing their own potential through behavioral change. Once the supervisee has made that investment, agent-supervisee contacts focus on helping the supervisee to develop and act on a realistic strategy to effect that change.

The Supervision Model. Under the PCS model, agents supervise between 50-55 high-risk and or high-need supervisees or approximately 200 low-risk and or low-need supervisees. For high-risk supervisees, agents conduct a thorough assessment and prepare an individualized case plan and behavioral contract based on the supervisee's risk and needs. The assessment includes the LSI-R and a supervisee self-assessment called the O-SELF. This instrument was developed to give supervisees the opportunity to give input and thus increase their personal investment to the case plan by soliciting their priorities on physical health, family life, relationships, education, employment, religious involvement, drug abuse, alcohol abuse and criminal behavior.

Agents also go into the community to interact frequently with supervisees; and work with police, family, employers and community resources. These various interactions provide additional resources that an agent can draw on to gain insight into a supervisee's life and the development of an ever

evolving case plan. By building relationships with the families, friends neighbors of supervisees, as well as their service providers, the agents are alerted to any trouble supervisees may be moving toward. Agent's armed with information can intervene before the supervisee commits a new crime and connect supervisees with services such as drug and alcohol treatment, housing assistance, food and medical assistance and to acquire basic education, job and employment skills.

Agent-supervisee contact takes on a different character in the PCS model. The traditional contact focuses on compliance monitoring. Under PCS, agents use all contacts as interventions or opportunities for guiding supervisees toward acting responsibly and lawfully. This supervision model also emphasizes the agent's role as a manager of supervisee's behavior. Like good managers in other settings, the agent's role is to help motivate and craft circumstances that enable the supervisee to succeed by guiding, facilitating and reinforcing the change process. By using effective communication and intervention strategies to guide the contact, the agent facilitates the change process by helping the supervisee to recognize the issues and to establish or reinstate a strategy to change directions. The agent's role is to be the catalyst for change, as well as the impetus for expeditiously returning non-compliant supervisees who pose a public safety risk to custody. (Sachwald, Eley, Taxman, 2006) The goal is to ensure that the agent uses effective intervention tools to achieve both immediate and lasting public safety.

Defining a Case Plan. University of Maryland researchers assisted MDPP in developing a scientifically tested and validated triage tool — the PCS Risk Screener — which is completed at intake to direct supervisees to the proper level of supervision. It saves time and conserves

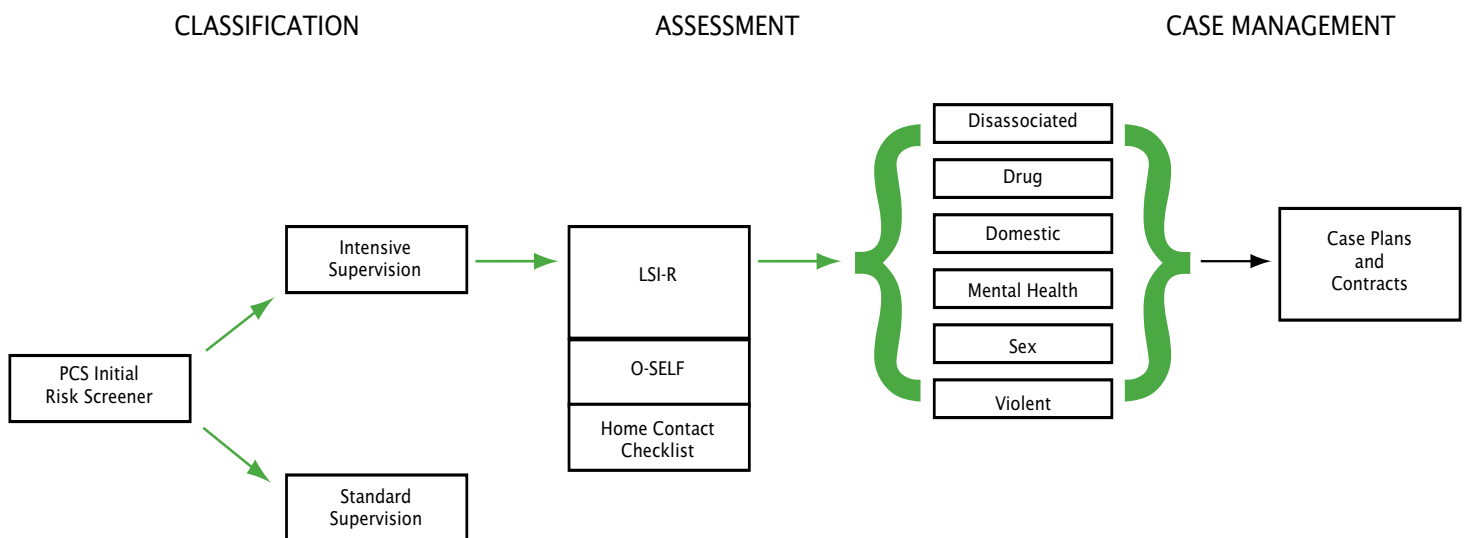
resources by pinpointing low-risk supervisees who do not need the full LSI-R risk and needs assessment and or case plan development. According to Dr. Edward Latessa, Professor and Head of the Division of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati:

Why waste our programs on offenders who do not need them? This is a waste of resources and more importantly, research has clearly demonstrated that when we place lower-risk offenders in our more structured programs, we often increase their failure rates and thus reduce the overall effectiveness of the program.

Traditional community supervision is a reactive style of case management. For example, most interactions happen in an office setting and agents take the approach, "I tell you what you can and cannot do and then I react to your compliance or non-compliance" (Hershey & Blanchard, 1998). In contrast, PCS's most basic tenet is to employ a holistic approach to case management from the viewpoint that supervisees need to reconnect with the community in a positive way; and agents help make that happen. It is not the gut reaction or intuition of an agent that guides the level of supervision, but the use of a validated and comprehensive risk and needs assessment tool. Supervisees classified as "high- risk" receive intense supervision.

MDPP developed a case supervision model (see Figure 1.) that allows agents to identify supervisee risk factors, develop feasible supervision plans that include accountability measures and monitor the progress of the plan's implementation. The model process applies the tenets of PCS and has the following components:

FIGURE 1
PCS Model of Supervision: Defining a Case Plan



- Intake and risk screening to select high-risk supervisees
- Initial supervision visit to define the obligations of supervision for the supervisee
- Risk and need assessment to identify factors related to the supervisee's involvement in criminal behavior. MDPP uses the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) to develop electronic comprehensive case plans and behavioral contracts for supervisees
- Comprehensive supervision plan that targets services to offender needs and community resources which establishes minimum levels of supervision for the supervisee and
- Supervision that utilizes sanctions and incentives.

Organizational and Professional Development

The PCS model calls for a very different set of skills for agents and supervisors. The PCS team must be an enthusiastic, energetic group of professionals who think creatively, want to take an active role in executing a supervision plan and can work cooperatively within a team. They must be able to make decisions and be empowered to act on them. Training in a variety of areas of such as interpersonal and leadership skills, conflict management and team building is intensive and ongoing. This is necessary because teams must be able to work effectively with supervisees and members of the community and because promotions, transfers and resignations result in changes to each team's composition. The loss of a dynamic supervisor can be a temporary setback for a team.

More than 700 agents and 100 first- and mid-level supervisors participated in MDPP's initial communication and skills development. MDPP conducted training in three phases: pre-training, comprehensive classroom training and booster training. Pre-training sessions were conducted by facilitators from the University of Maryland, Bureau of Governmental Research as a three-hour introduction to the concepts of PCS and a briefing on the menu of training the agents and supervisors would receive in preparation for their transition to the PCS model of managing their caseloads. Trainers conducted the pre-training session at each of the offices selected for PCS to keep agents and supervisors in a familiar setting where they felt at ease. The trainees received a variety of materials that described PCS concepts, such as the manual entitled "*Nuts and Bolts of PCS*", (BGR, 2001). Other handouts were distributed that outlined the training topics and concepts the agents and supervisors would be learning in preparation for the new direction MDPP was taking in community supervision.

A team of outside facilitators and MDPP employees, who had been trained as trainers in the topics covered in the three-day PCS training session, conducted comprehensive training sessions off-site. The MDPP employees understood the nuances of case management, had a thorough understanding of the agency's workings as well as a good rapport with

their colleagues. The inclusion of MDPP trainers who knew the work environment provided the trainees a level of comfort and credibility about the things they were going to learn and implement. The topics covered during this intensive training session included Motivational Interviewing, Interpersonal Communication, Team Building, Conflict Management and Resolution, Decision-Making, Fundamental PCS Practices, Evidence-Based Practices and Strengthening Community Partnerships.

The learning climate of any training is extremely important to its overall effect. Learning tools can enhance an environment by compelling employees to interact with each other and the trainers during the session and by eschewing the regular lecture and listen strategy. (Taxman, Shepardson & Bello, 2004) The use of role-play scenarios proved to be a very successful learning tool for the trainees. The process of acting out familiar agent-supervisee scenarios was an effective exercise in allowing trainees to use their new skills. MDPP trainers used an interactive CD-ROM (Bureau of Governmental Research, 2001) that presented the community supervision flow process a supervisee moves through as he or she becomes invested in rehabilitation. The CD-ROM included policies, games, videos of scenarios and quizzes to test participants' knowledge. These interactive tools actively engage the trainees in the learning process, which ultimately increases participant retention (Taxman, Shepardson & Bellow, 2004)

MDPP reassigned 12 field supervisors and formed a cadre of trainers who conducted comprehensive communication skills training during the second year of PCS implementation. Booster training reinforces concepts and skills previously learned, addresses questions and doubts about the underlying science and provides supplemental information about those skills. Trainees also have the opportunity to speak freely about any difficulties they may have had in using the new practices.

PCS implementation was staged to accompany the development of new communication, interviewing and contingency management skills needed by agents and supervisors to be successful managers of behavioral change. First, MDPP introduced motivational interviewing and other communication strategies to provide agents with interviewing verbal communication techniques. Consequently, guidelines were established regarding the use of socially acceptable decorum for dealing with supervisees; (i.e., using salutations to address them and establishing eye contact with them). These techniques were designed to ensure that MDPP created an office environment where supervisees could learn social skills through interactions with their agents. MDPP employed a coaching model where front-line supervisors used Quality Contact Standards to monitor agents' use of the techniques and as a structured mechanism to provide feedback to develop staff skills. (Taxman, Yancey and Bilanin, 2006)

The Quality Contact Standards (QCS) form is a tool in the PCS model to measure communications skills. It is also a key tool for evaluating agents and measuring accountability to ensure that communication skills are maintained. The first-line supervisor uses the tool during random observations of agent and supervisee interactions to evaluate how well the agent employs the various components of the QCS process. Quality Contact Standards are reviewed in booster training to reinforce and sustain learned skills.

The QCS form gauges an agent's ability to accomplish several skills during a contact including:

- Deportment and Manner with the Offender (e.g., posture, politeness, preparation for interview and achievement of the meeting's goals)
- Assessment and Planning (e.g., use of appropriate communications skills, reinforcement of positive behaviors, review of supervisee's progress, ongoing assessment and verifying case status information)
- Treatment and Service Referral (e.g., focused on supervisee's problem solving abilities, appropriate referrals made and helped the supervisee plan for both goals and obstacles while guiding the change process)
- Sanctions and Ground Rules (e.g., reminding the supervisee of the rules and the legal consequences and conducts sanctions in a clear and fair manner)

Case plans were the focus for the next level of professional development. This involved training on the use of the selected case plan instrument (Level of Service Inventory-Revised - LSI-R), how to identify criminogenic traits through interviewing supervisees and how to address criminogenic traits in the resulting case plan. The emphasis on professional development acquainted agents with the supervision toolbox (e.g., drug tests, community services, treatment, vocational education, employment and support networks) and on how the different tools can be used for the purpose of improving supervision outcomes. A software tool called MOCSE (Maryland Offender Case-planning Software for Empowerment) was also provided to agents to assist with the process of translating all of the data collected about the supervisee into a meaningful case plan. The software requires front-line supervisors to certify the content of the proposed case plan. (Taxman, et al, 2006). MDPP is now developing an alternate process for case plan drafting that does not require the use of MOCSE and will enable agents to develop plans when they are off-site.

Tools of the Trade. In December 2004, *Tools of the Trade: A Guide to Incorporating Science into Practice* (Taxman, Shepardson and Byrne, 2004) was jointly published by the National Institute of Corrections and the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

to assist community supervision professionals with integrating the science of effective offender management into their day-to-day activities. Much of the content in *Tools* is based on PCS. *Tools* is available online at www.nicic.org/pubs/2004/020095.pdf. MDPP employees in the PCS pioneer areas and general supervision offices make use of *Tools* in both formal and informal professional development activities. Like the booster training sessions, it serves as an excellent vehicle for reinforcing evidence-based practice knowledge and skills.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is a fundamental element of successful supervision. As previously mentioned, community residents are an excellent source of information about a supervisee's behavior in the community. Equally important are the programs and services that are available in the community. Part of the goal of using supervision to help offenders become productive and law-abiding includes helping them develop the knowledge and ability to seek needed services in the community independently. It is likely that some time after parole or probation has ended, that the former supervisee or a significant other in the former supervisee's life will need drug or mental health treatment, education or new job skills. When these needs are triggered the supervisee needs to be capable of identifying and accessing community resources.

PCS implementation in Maryland followed the horrific tragedies of September 11, 2001 and the resulting budgetary constraints necessitated that we supplement service delivery capacity by developing partnerships and collaborative relationships with community partners. Community outreach is a vital part of partnership creation and an effective means for educating and engaging community stakeholders. MDPP relentlessly pursues development of formalized relationships in all Maryland communities and has formalized relationships with non-profit organizations, treatment providers, law enforcement agencies, educational, social services, other government agencies, private industry and faith-based organizations. These organizations and agencies have the capacity to provide many of the services supervisees need. MDPP found that several of these service operations were surprisingly under-utilized and welcomed a steady stream of clients to meet their goals and objectives as well as to fulfill the terms and conditions set by their funders.

Effective utilization of existing community resources — whether under contract or partnership — helps to reduce supervisee risk factors. In addition, collaborations and partnerships enable agents to move supervisees along a continuum of services and sanctions, which increases community safety and impacts offender behavior. Important resources like *Tools of the Trade* also should be exchanged with community partners and cross-training should be actively pursued.

In Maryland, the volume of opportunities for expanded partnering with a variety of community groups was found to be far greater than envisioned. Indeed, the possibilities for collaboration are limited only by the imagination, creativity and persistence of those seeking them out. In Baltimore City, for example, during a meeting in a church to discuss what services the church could provide to supervisees in that community — the PCS Administrator realized at the end of a meeting that he was in the wrong church but the pastor had the same last name as the pastor at the church where he actually had an appointment. Seizing on this opportunity, the PCS Administrator got commitments from both churches that day.

MDPP also has formed a noteworthy partnership with the police department in Baltimore City in which police officers join agents in making at home contacts and the two agencies share both information and intelligence. In addition, police officers and agents are cross-trained in the other's policies and procedures; MDPP agents and supervisors attend weekly COMSTAT meetings and participate in the police commissioner's monthly meeting with district commanders; agents utilize space in all nine police district precincts as alternative work sites; and regular meetings are held at the patrol and field and command and executive staff levels to improve and maintain a productive relationship between the agencies. MDPP also assigned half of its warrant apprehension officers to the Baltimore Metropolitan Warrant Task Force.

Evaluation and Evolution. In February 2006, a team of researchers from the University of Maryland and Virginia Commonwealth University led by Dr. Faye Taxman presented MDPP with a report entitled, *Proactive Community Supervision in Maryland: Changing Offender Outcomes*. This report provides MDPP with an analysis of PCS implementation and how it is affecting offender supervision. The report clearly shows that PCS is making a difference in helping offenders to remain crime and violation free while in the community. The evaluation, which used a random selection and individual match design to study outcomes for 548 supervisees, concluded that:

- PCS participants are 38.3 percent less likely to be arrested for new criminal behavior than the non-PCS group; and
- PCS supervision resulted in a 38 percent reduction in the probability of a warrant being filed for a technical violation.

While the evaluation of PCS found that significant progress had been made through the implementation of this evidence-based practice model, it also identified actions that MDPP needed to take to strengthen implementation:

- Develop agents' expertise in typologies
- Develop management strategies for ambivalent team members
- Develop a process for ensuring focus on high-risk/high need supervisees
- Develop supervisor expertise in areas of case planning and monitoring to improve skills.

Within 60 days of receiving the evaluation, the PCS offices developed comprehensive corrective action plans with timetables including specific assignments of tasks to address gaps as noted from the evaluation. The teams continue to chart progress on the action steps, as well as developing a number of tools to address the gaps cited in the evaluation report. Some examples are:

- The PCS forms were modified to include an assessment of correct typology assignment, supervisee responsibilities, agent responsibilities, criminogenic needs and triggers. This modification serves as a means of measuring and evaluating how agents are doing their specific tasks and if they are doing them correctly. The modified forms focus on: level of case activity, case staffing, supervision case review and community activity observation.
- *Reinforcement, Research and Reality* (The Three "R's") – A learning environment has been created through consistent reinforcement of policy, protocol, procedures and best practices. This reinforcement of "research" and "reality" happens during case staffing, supervisory review of case plans, monthly caseload reviews, team meetings and during supervisory reprimands.
- *Tools of the Trade* is used at team meetings. Some supervisors reinforce best practices by reviewing sections of the manual. Other supervisors have the agents take charge of reviewing and teaching sections of the manual at team meetings.
- The offices are pursuing the creation of visual tools (posters) on Typologies and Stages of Change.
- Agents will be offered ongoing skills training through the MDPP training unit.

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

(Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*, 1971)

Within MDPP, the evolution of evidence-based practices and successful implementation relies on the core values and motivation of the employees. As stated before, the PCS team must be an enthusiastic, energetic group of professionals who think creatively who want to take an active role in executing a supervision plan, can work cooperatively within a team and most importantly want to find the best and most productive ways to do their jobs. Allowing employees the creativity and freedom to find the best ways to tweak, change and to provide feedback to manage an evermore challenging criminal population may be our best approach to protecting public safety. ►►▲

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Endnotes

"MDPP consciously chose the term pioneer over the term pilot. We made a commitment to implement supervision strategies based on research and believe that these practices will evolve along with new research findings. In the interest of public safety, we cannot revert to old, failed practices.

Judith Sachwald is the Director of the Maryland Division of Parole and Probation in Baltimore, Maryland. Ernest Eley, Jr. is an administrator with the Maryland Division of Parole and Probation in Baltimore, Maryland.