

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Assessment and Case Planning

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Summary/Conclusions

This article is part of a larger document that includes a number of useful tools for offender management. The authors suggest some exercises through which the probation officer (PO) can determine the probationer's readiness for change, identify the probationer's interests, and select the best services to match the probationer's risk and needs. Interventions should be prioritized, while nurturing the probationer's buy-in. The authors stress that the case planning process should address the "big six" criminogenic need areas: low self-control, anti-social personality, anti-social values, criminal peers, substance abuse, and dysfunctional family.

Limitations of Information

This article provides a general overview of case planning and includes items, which are not taught in Colorado probation's case plan training. The reader can find more information on case planning by visiting probation's page on Judicialnet or completing the State training in case planning.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Assessing Offenders and Developing Case Plans

A case plan is based on the strength of the probationer officer's assessment. The results of the CYO/LSI or LSI, in conjunction with other information, will identify the probationer's risk and need areas. There are six factors "directly related to crime: low self-control, anti-social personality, anti-social values, criminal peers, substance abuse, and dysfunctional family." The more a case plan can address these "big six," the better the odds of reducing recidivism.

Once the risk and needs of the probationer have been assessed, the PO needs to find services to address these areas. To best match probationer's with services, the PO must engage the "responsivity principle." Consider the probationer's readiness to change and refer to an appropriate level of treatment. Additionally, determine if the probationer has any learning or cognitive problems, which will effect his ability to participate in treatment, then make the appropriate referral. The activities you place in the case plan should reflect the probationer's risk level (e.g. a high risk offender needs more supervision than a medium risk offender) and his need areas (e.g. substance abuse problem).

Case plans should be prioritized to include the most important risk/needs areas. When negotiating the priorities of a case plan with the probationer, include his responsibilities to the court in order of priority. For example, substance abuse treatment should be completed before community service.

The PO can use the interests of the probationer to gain "buy-in" for the case plan. For example, if a juvenile probationer is interested in learning to play

the guitar, the PO can arrange lessons in exchange for the completion of educational requirements. Using incentives will assist the PO in gaining the probationer's interest in completing responsibilities.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Use assessment results to clearly identify risk and needs.
- ✓ Match the probationer's motivation and learning ability to the appropriate treatment agency or group.
- ✓ Increase the probationer's buy-in with motivational interviewing techniques, weaving incentives into the accomplishment of case plan goals.
- ✓ Ensure case plan goals are measurable and outcome-based, with clear strategies or action steps that lead towards goal accomplishment.
- ✓ Initially, set case plan goals that can be met quickly. "Meeting a few goals quickly builds momentum," and case plans can be updated regularly.
- ✓ Include cognitive behavioral therapy in case plans for higher risk offenders. Skill building is essential to lowering their risk in several criminogenic need areas.
- ✓ Don't forget to case plan for building social networks. Assist the probationer in identifying pro-social people or community organizations with whom they can begin to spend time and develop a positive support network.

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