“Thinking Globally, Acting Locally”: Applying International Trends to Reentry Partnerships in the United States

James M. Byrne & Don Hummer

Professor, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Massachusetts at Lowell, 870 Broadway Street, Suite 2, Lowell, MA, 01854 Phone: (978) 934-3992 Fax: (978) 934-3992 E-mail:

Professor, Penn State Schuylkill, 212 Administration Building, 200 University Drive, Schuylkill Haven, PA Phone: (570) 385-6064 E-mail:

Published online: 01 Jun 2011.


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2005.9678733

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions
“Thinking Globally, Acting Locally”: Applying International Trends to Reentry Partnerships in the United States

JAMES M. BYRNE
University of Massachusetts at Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts

DON HUMMER
Penn State Schuylkill, Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania

Current approaches of the criminal justice system in the United States focus on community control rather than the provision of services and treatment for returning prisoners; however, reentry is a primary focus of correctional systems around the world. Now that reentry initiatives have become more prominent within the American criminal justice system, there is ample opportunity to look to other nations for the strategic implementation of reentry programs to reduce recidivism. Uniting the correctional philosophies of multiple nations that experience lower rates of incarceration is a holistic approach to offender treatment in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

By the end of the 20th century, more than 600,000 individuals were being released annually from state and federal prisons in the United States (Travis, 2005; Camp & Camp, 1999). At the current rate of reoffending, it is expected that approximately two thirds of this group will be rearrested and half will be remanded back to prison within 3 years of their release dates (Visher & Travis, 2003). This phenomenon can be traced back directly to tougher sentencing policies initiated in the 1980s, which spiked prison populations from just under 0.5 million total inmates in 1985 to nearly 1.5 million in 2002 (Parent & Barnett, 2002). Budget cuts at the federal and state levels forced probation and parole agencies to attend to larger supervisory populations with fewer resources (Parent & Barnett, 2004). The net result has been greater numbers of offenders being thrust back into a society from which they had been removed for a substantial period of time with inadequate supervision and support networks available to facilitate their reintegration. The recidivism figures should, therefore, not be surprising given the numbers of offenders being reintroduced into communities disinclined to accept such individuals (Petersilia, 2003).

Recently, a renewed focus on offender reentry has shifted responsibility for the reduction of recidivism from the offender alone to society at large. This systems-perspective model of community reintegration is not a new idea. Early 20th-century American corrections emphasized programs that prepared released prisoners for life outside prison walls. An amalgam of strategies
including job training, substance abuse assistance, and therapy all were
common components of an offender’s post-release regimen (Petersilia, 2003).
Whereas the current approach in the United States appears to focus much more
on community control than service provision (or community treatment), reen-
try continues to be a primary focus of correctional systems around the globe.
Indeed, some nations redoubled efforts to reduce recidivism while the United
States concerned itself with punitive measures such as “Truth in Sentencing.”
Now that reentry initiatives have once again become a primary concern of the
American criminal justice system, it is perhaps time to look comparatively at
the efforts of other nations where recidivism is not as endemic and examine
the stratagems used successfully within these correctional systems to see how
these ideas could be translated to reentry initiatives on our shores. Shadd
Maruna, Russ Immarigeon, and Thomas LeBel (2004) state that the difficulty
experienced by returning offenders attempting to desist from crime is univer-
sal. For this reason, examination of a range of reentry initiatives from a divers-
ity of global settings is necessary to comprehend crime problems and criminal
justice responses fully (Maruna et al., 2004).

One component that unites the correctional philosophies of many nations
with lower rates of incarceration is a holistic approach to offender treatment
and rehabilitation that begins at the point of contact with the criminal justice
system and continues throughout sanctioning and release. Rather than shift
responsibility and control from one subsystem to the next, the totality of the
system assumes some responsibility for returning the offender back into soci-
ety reformed and rehabilitated and utilizes a punitive sanction as well as
community-based treatment and counseling. For example, as part of an updat-
ed strategy to address the problem of drug users entering the system and reof-
fending in England, a Drug Interventions Programme has been instituted
around the ideas of “throughcare” and “aftercare” (Fox, Khan, Briggs, Rees-
Jones, Thompson, & Owens, 2005). In this model, drug offenders have access
to a range of services and oversight starting at arrest and continuing through
pretrial custody, court hearings, sentencing, and finally to reentry (Fox et al.,
2005). After the offender is resettled into the community, “aftercare”
becomes the package of support services available to the drug user after the
formal term of supervision by the system expires.

Global Trends in Corrections and Offender Reintegration

The rate of incarceration in the United States approached 500 per 100,000
citizens at the beginning of the 21st century and has continued upward (Byrne
& Taxman, 2004). Writing in 1996, Chris Eskridge stated that the incarcera-
tion rate in the United States was “far and away the highest incarceration rate
in the world” (1996, p. 209). By comparison, global incarceration rates tend to
be between 20 and 150 per 100,000 citizens; western European nations gener-
ally have rates below 120 per 100,000 people (Eskridge, 1996). The available
comparative empirical evidence from INTERPOL (2004) suggests that the
United States does have a higher rate of violent crime when compared to other common law or industrialized nations, but many of these countries are closing the gap quickly (Lynch, 2004). Further, when comparing property crime rates, the United States is virtually indistinguishable from other nations (Lynch, 2004). Where the United States differs markedly is in the length of sentences imposed and the average time served by offense when these figures are examined comparatively (Lynch, 2004). See Table 1 for a comparison among nations between length of imposed sentences and Table 2 for a comparison of time served.

Table 1. Length of Imposed Sentence by Nation and Offense in Months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATION</th>
<th>Homicide</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Motor Vehicle Theft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England/Wales</td>
<td>229.9</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2. Mean Time Served in Custody by Nation and Offense in Months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATION</th>
<th>Homicide</th>
<th>Robbery</th>
<th>Burglary</th>
<th>Motor Vehicle Theft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England/Wales</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (Prison Only)</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (Prison &amp; Jail)</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples From Abroad

The discrepancy in the numbers of adults in correctional facilities between the United States and other industrialized nations is the result of a multitude of factors. However, the decreased emphasis on an inmate’s success after his incarceration ends factors into the exponential growth of inmates in the United States. By comparison, in Denmark, there is an overriding viewpoint among lawmakers (influenced undoubtedly by the criminological community) that law violations are the byproduct of societal conditions and the relative position of dispossessed young males in the social framework (Brydenshold, 1980). Whereas this viewpoint also is held in the United States by many criminologists and so-called “liberal” commentators, the reality is that American correctional policy has reflected punitive legislative action at both the state and federal levels. The most expedient solution regarding increased rates of violence, disorder, and loss of property was to isolate lawbreakers from society for longer periods of time.

Other nations saw the ramifications of long-term incarceration and its deleterious effects on both the inmates and the communities to which they returned. India, for example, has utilized penal colonies to supervise offenders convicted of serious crimes and sentenced to lengthy prison terms (Bowker, 1982). One of the primary rationales for adopting the concept for maximum-security inmates is to normalize living conditions, given that most offenders in the Indian system will at some point be released. When the offender returns to his or her community, “the nearly impossible task of reentering society after so many years is more likely to be a success if the incarcerative environment has not been so dramatically different from that of the outside world” (Selke, 1993, p. 105). Similarly, the French correctional system seeks to house as many offenders as possible at detention centers instead of prisons, which are reserved for the most violent and troublesome inmates. Offenders in detention centers have a higher degree of interaction with staff, more freedom and individual responsibility, and the opportunity to partake in numerous services to prevent reoffending (Terrill, 1992).

Obviously, the easiest means of reintegrating an offender is to not segregate that offender from his community in the first place. A cooperative effort within Denmark’s criminal justice system began two decades ago in response to concerns about the over-reliance of the Danish justice system on incarceration. Danish police, magistrates, and correctional officials proposed a system of “depenalization” for certain types of offenses (i.e., drugs and prostitution) whereby offenders convicted of such crimes would receive community-based sanctions, reserving more prison spaces for violent and repeat offenders (Selke, 1993). The rationale of Danish justice officials was that although community/corrections resources would have to be expanded, the long-term savings would outweigh the short-term costs by significantly reducing the incarcerated population while simultaneously posing little-to-no increased risk of victimization for society at large.
Japan has perhaps the best example of a humanitarian, rehabilitative model of offender reentry in the world. Japan’s nationality comprises a homogenous society that reflects a common history, language, and race (Terrill, 1992); however, Japan’s cities have experienced the types of criminality common to urban areas in any modern, industrialized nation including gang activity, drugs, and “victimless” crime. Japanese views on offending and prisoner rehabilitation have remained constant over the decades: that is, a societal tendency of “pity” toward the criminal offender and the notion that any punitive sentence should be short and follow a rehabilitative ideal (Terrill, 1992). The National Offenders Rehabilitation Commission oversees the rehabilitation of offenders in Japan, and this body plays a central role in parole decisions as well as programs for offenders, both in prison and after sanctions expire. The Commission is informed by local parole boards but is autonomous in its rulings. It also may receive input from other criminal justice agencies and from non-governmental sources with in-depth knowledge of particular offenders. Parole officers in this system are used primarily “to offer aid and guidance” to parolees and to otherwise be of assistance in transitioning the offender back to his community (Terrill, 1992, p. 254).

International Correctional Philosophy: the Cornerstone for System-Wide Reentry Programs in the United States

The “get tough on crime” era in the United States systematically has whittled away the extensive measures that were previously in place to prepare inmates for release from the institution (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). A reallocation of resources accompanied the shift in focus from institutional programming, geared toward offender success upon release, to programming aimed at maintaining order within the walls of the facility. America saw the management of institutions operating at over 100 percent capacity and populated by more violent inmates without an imminent release date. Parole oversight also went from assistance for offenders on the outside to casework management and minimal supervision, leaving many disaffected former offenders in unfamiliar territory with little support structure. Parole officers were more likely to have contact with police officers arresting parole violators than they were to have contact with parolees themselves, thus leading to a greater likelihood of parole violators being remanded back to prison (Seiter & Kadela, 2003).

The ramifications of blossoming inmate populations are widespread economically, politically, and socially. With a majority of offenders caught in a perpetual cycle of release, reoffending, and reincarceration, coupled with new offenders entering the system daily, the U.S. prison population runs the risk of spiraling upward at a rate that cannot be addressed with present correctional budgets or space limitations. The renewed focus on helping offenders successfully reenter their communities therefore can be viewed not as a “kinder, gentler” mindset of the American populace but as an effort to stem the growing tide of offenders so that the current system remains functional.
Regardless of why reentry initiatives are undertaken, the goal is for these strategies to reduce successfully the number of former inmates returning to prison. Therefore, it is natural to look toward other correctional models to ascertain what works. It is clear when examining foreign correctional practices that unlike in the United States, successful reintegration of offenders is the responsibility of the entire system as well as agencies and networks outside of the criminal justice system. Many social welfare democracies view the rehabilitation of offenders as a primary mission of the criminal justice system, thus necessitating the development of comprehensive parole and aftercare structures to respond to this mandate (Hornum, 1988). In a number of instances, parole agencies work closely with police, courts, probation officers, substance abuse counselors, and medical providers to create an aftercare program best designed for helping the former offender modify his or her past behavior and prevent a return to prison. This system-wide approach certainly can be imported and modified to address the problems unique to recidivism in this country. The following sections outline the key points in the reentry process and how these actors can partner to implement an integrated model of offender reintegration in the United States.

Reentry Partnership Initiatives in the United States

The Reentry Partnership Initiatives (RPIs) recently implemented in the United States share a common vision about offenders, communities, and the issue of public safety: *we must act as a system to improve public safety in our communities* (see Figure 1). Such a view is diametrically opposed to the punitive nature of the criminal justice system exhibited in the last several decades but recognizes the reality of thousands of offenders returning to society each day. Although there are a number of potential avenues to explore in the name of public safety (e.g., community crime prevention and restorative justice), a system-wide focus on the problems and needs of the “reentering” offender population certainly is justified. The RPI will require key criminal justice system “actors” (i.e., police, courts, corrections, and community) to redefine their role and responsibility in this area, focusing not on what individual agencies should be doing, but on what the “partnership” should be doing to improve public safety.

To facilitate a shift from individual agency-level reentry activities to coordinated system-wide reentry efforts, fundamental changes in the roles and responsibilities of police, court, and corrections personnel will have to be made. A major development is the inclusion of the community and victims in the partnership, allowing a sharing of some of the responsibilities for offender reintegration.

Leadership

Based on our review of reentry partnership initiatives, it appears that there are three essential characteristics of a successful reentry program: (1) leader-
ship, (2) partnership, and (3) ownership. In the context of reentry, effective leadership likely will be related to how well program managers articulate their "vision" to reentry staff, offenders, and the community. In an examination of the characteristics of successful companies in the business sector, James Collins and Jerry Porras (1997) observed:

If there is any one "secret" to an enduring great company, it is the ability to manage continuity and change...even the visionary companies...need to continually remind themselves of the crucial distinction between core and non-core, between what should never change and what should be open for change, between what is truly sacred and what is not (p. xv).

This is a critical point to keep in mind when viewing the changes associated with the current wave of reentry programs. Reentry programs do not represent the latest "fad" in the correctional management game; indeed, they are based on a review of the empirical research on what works with offenders in institutional and/or community settings. However, the reentry model requires organizations to rethink their mission or purpose, and based on this reassessment, to redefine the roles and responsibilities of line staff involved in the reentry process. Considering the number of organizations, agencies, and community groups involved in reentry, leadership obviously is a key ingredient in the success of a system-wide intervention strategy.
The leadership challenge associated with the RPI is two-fold: (1) there must be a strong leadership role within an organization; and (2) there must be a strong leadership role within the partnership. Based on our review of the initial development of reentry programs across several sites, it appears that the first step should be to select a full-time project director for the initiative who has the ability and authority to develop a program-based strategy for reentry that spans the boundaries of traditional organizations. It is the project director who will act as the lynchpin in this system-wide effort.

Partnerships
In addition to leadership, successful reentry programs also will include true partnerships comprised of all of the key decision makers involved in reentry. We use the term “true” to refer to programs that involve partnership members at every key decision point in the reentry process including policy development, operational practice, and staff decision making. When program developers describe RPIs, they often spend an inordinate amount of time identifying who is included in the partnership, but little is offered on how often these partners meet, what they discuss, and how decisions are made. One caveat about partnerships can be offered at this point: we can learn more about a particular RPI model by identifying who is not included than who is included in the partnership.

Ownership
The final characteristic of an effective RPI program is system-wide ownership. Partnership members need to accept the notion that offender reentry problems are not someone else’s problems; they are their problems. They do this in a number of important ways: (a) they identify quality staff from their agency to work on RPI program development and implementation issues; (b) they commit resources to the reentry program; and (c) they incorporate “reentry” into a revised mission statement for their agency/organization. One strategy that may be effective in convincing partnership members to “own” the reentry problem is to focus on the impact of the proposed initiative on public safety in targeted communities.

Developing A Systems Perspective on Offender Processing

Even a cursory review of the literature on organizational change (see Collins & Porras, 1997; Cochran, 1992) reveals the inherent difficulty in redefining the system-wide role essential to the development of a successful reentry partnership. When we view the reentry problem from a systems perspective, essentially we are examining how changes in one component of the criminal justice system (e.g., the police make more arrests for drug possession) affect other parts of the system (e.g., the pressure to plea bargain to reduce backlog in court results in more offenders with drug problems in prison). A systems perspective of reentry raises many questions such as: Why are so many more
THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

offenders “maxing out” of prison today and returning to the community with no conditions of release and/or community supervision? The obvious answer is that changes in release status are related directly to changes in sentencing practices in many states, particularly the use of mandatory sentences for drug offenders.

A large number of offenders are unable to survive in the community upon release from prison. Two out of every three young adult offenders released from prison this year will be rearrested within 3 years; 40 percent will be returned to prison in this period (General Accounting Office, 2001). Reentry “failures” represent criminal justice system failures that must be addressed (e.g., by changes in laws, law enforcement, court processing, sentencing schemes, institutional treatment/control, and community treatment/control). Reentry failures also may be explained by changes in the mental health system. About one in five released offenders has a serious mental health problem. The economy also plays a role in hindering reentry efforts (e.g., job availability and/or job training is an ongoing problem for most offenders, as is the housing issue). The community itself may be a barrier to reentry (e.g., community attitudes toward certain groups of offenders, community tolerance for certain types of behavior, etc.).

From a systems perspective, problems associated with offender reentry cannot be solved unless a partnership of key system actors is formed to examine carefully the link between system inputs (i.e., money, staff, and support), activities (i.e., police, court, corrections, and mental health practices), and outputs (i.e., arrests, convictions, sentence type/length, offender recidivism, community crime rates, and/or fear of crime). Once these system linkages are examined and the gaps or shortfalls in the system are identified, the partnership team can take the first steps toward planning for real change in reentry policies and practices.

Police and Reentry Partnerships

When the topic of prison release is raised, it is usually within the context of judicial and/or parole decision making. It can be argued that police departments also should have a role in release decisions such as the timing of the release, the offender’s location in a particular community, and the determination (where applicable) of release conditions. When we think about the police, it is usually in the context of offender control, not offender change; however, police departments involved in reentry initiatives encompass both activities. RPI programs require that police take a proactive role in reentry initiatives. For example, police officers at several sites visit the offender while he or she is in prison to discuss the police department’s role in the reentry program. Finally, police may serve on community boards that have a direct impact on release decisions and/or conditions.

Reentry programs will fundamentally change the nature and extent of the interaction between police and community corrections personnel. Because
these community supervision officers also have the power to arrest individuals and undergo police training, it could be argued that the line between community police and community supervision officers is becoming blurred. Information sharing will result in an increased level of informal surveillance by police in target communities, and the results of these surveillance activities will be shared with the community supervision officers who work in a given area. The role of the police in the community has been expanded to include both informal social control strategies (e.g., the use of guardians) and the pursuit of community justice initiatives.

Local police departments across the country have changed their role in the community by moving from a reactive to a proactive style of policing. It is this proactive, problem-solving approach that is at the core of police-offender interactions in reentry jurisdictions. In the RPI model, police visit offenders in prison prior to release rather than waiting until the offender is back on the street. Utilizing the latest offender profile data, police know who is returning to the community before they are released. It likely will take some time for offenders to realize that the role of the police in reentry jurisdictions has changed and that they are involved in activities that can help offenders turn their lives around. Until this occurs, offenders must recognize that the police will know which offenders are in treatment and employed and that they will adjust their surveillance activities based on this information.

The Role of the Institution Upon Reentry

The RPI has changed the institution’s role in the offender reentry process. Correctional administrators recognize that it is failures at the levels of probation and parole, not new prison admissions, that fuel the prison overcrowding crisis. Unless the problems and needs of offenders are identified via reliable classification and case management technology and addressed via quality treatment programs and comprehensive prerelease planning within the institution, essentially we are setting offenders up for failure. In the process, we are threatening the public health and safety of our communities.

The institution plays a critical role in each of the three phases of the reentry partnership continuum. In the institutional phase, decisions must be made about where to house the offender and on the types of treatment programs that should be made available to him (e.g., substance abuse, mental health, education, and anger management). What distinguishes the RPI model from “standard practice” is the emphasis placed on shared decision making by partnership members (such as the police, the victim, community corrections, treatment providers, and the community at large). Overall, it is not surprising that the institutional corrections system has embraced the idea that a partnership-based strategy — utilizing a system-wide planning model with shared decision making at key points in the reentry process — will be the most effective approach to the problem of offender recidivism.
Redefining the Institution’s Role

Just as the police have changed their role vis-à-vis the institution (e.g., they visit offenders while in prison and participate on community boards that review institutional treatment and release plans), the institution has changed the way it interacts with police. At several sites, the institution provides police with a list of returning offenders along with a picture of the offender and relevant background data. This information helps police departments prepare for the reentering offender. At the same time, the police department’s response to this information likely will assist the institution in reentry planning. In those cases where offenders are being released without community supervision, the police have become the defacto community supervision agency. In addition to information, institutional staff must coordinate the prison visits that police make in several jurisdictions. Finally, the institution considers police recommendations on both reentry target areas and offender eligibility.

The institutional corrections system in RPI jurisdictions recognizes the need to rethink its current treatment policies and practices. Critics of the current corrections practice have highlighted one of the paradoxes of institutional treatment in this country: on the one hand, we do not have enough treatment slots for offenders with needs, particularly in the areas of mental illness and/or substance abuse; on the other hand, most institutional treatment programs in this country operate at about 70 percent of capacity. By focusing attention on the need for a “seamless system” strategy that integrates institutional and community-based treatment programs, reentry program developers are attempting to redefine the priorities of the prison, placing offender treatment on the same priority level as institutional control and safety.

Another issue related to the changing role of the institution in the reentry process is how best to manage the transition from institutional to community treatment. By moving offenders to a site closer to their release location, offenders are able to continue their work-release jobs upon reentry. Given the link between employment and reduction of recidivism, this strategy certainly makes sense from a public safety perspective (see Byrne & Pattavina, 1992).

Employment is only one of the issues that must be addressed by both the institution and community corrections staff during reentry. Others include housing, family, substance abuse, mental health, and offender control issues. Clearly defining the roles of partnership participants in each phase of the reentry process provides a more seamless transfer of services and reduces conflict about responsibilities created by new program initiatives. The newest innovation in the partnership is the involvement of community volunteers in the structured reentry process. The community has selected community residents to be guardians, advocates, or sponsors for the offenders returning home. The role of the community representative is to build a relationship with the offender prior to release and to help the offender during his or her initial period back in the community.
Treatment Providers In the Reentry Process

Institutional and community-based treatment providers are critical to the success of the RPI. A number of recent reviews of treatment availability and quality (see Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997) have underscored the fact that most institutions cannot address the treatment needs of a large segment of their institutional populations. Because the vast majority (97%) of offenders currently in prison will be released to the community at some point (Petersilia, 2000), it makes sense from a public safety perspective to address their substance abuse, mental health, skill/employment, family, health, and housing needs while in prison (Taxman & Bouffard, 2000).

Continuity of Care

RPI model programs emphasize the importance of treatment both within the institution and in the community. The term “treatment” has been defined broadly by RPI program developers and includes mental health programs (individual and group), education programs, vocational programs, and even prison-industry programs. One of the first tasks in the reentry process is to assess and classify offenders. If the offender agrees to participate in the program, reentry staff then would review existing classification data available from the offender’s case file and conduct additional assessments, where appropriate.

During the structured reentry phase, offenders begin to make the transition from institutional life back to the community. To facilitate continuity of treatment, offender treatment plans upon release are designed as a continuation of treatment began in the institution. It is anticipated that institutional and community-based treatment staff will work with other partnership members (e.g., institutional prerelease staff, community corrections staff, local police, and community boards) to develop the offender’s reintegration plan. For offenders on some type of conditional release status, participation in certain forms of community treatment may be required (e.g., substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and employment assistance). However, participation in community-based treatment programs will be voluntary for many offenders, particularly those released upon expiration of their sentences. The role of the community treatment provider will have to be much more proactive for this offender population.

Whereas there has been much discussion by RPI program developers about the use of coercive treatment strategies for at least some groups of releasees (e.g., substance abusers and sex offenders), the implementation of such a strategy likely would entail major revisions in existing criminal codes. A recent review of this issue by Douglas Marlowe (2001) concluded that “coercive treatment can be effective and acceptable to clients” (p. 65). However, RPI program developers have not yet addressed this issue.

For substance-abusing offenders released conditionally, treatment providers will develop “relapse prevention” strategies in conjunction with local
police, community corrections, and various community support groups in a manner similar to England’s model treatment program for drug offenders. The unconditional releasees represent a unique challenge for treatment providers because of the lack of formal correction-based sanctions available for non-compliant offenders. For these offenders, as well as other offenders in some form of voluntary treatment program, RPI program developers plan to use positive incentives (e.g., housing, job training, and employment assistance) to induce ongoing participation.

Treatment providers play a critical role in the community control of offenders because they are addressing problems that we know are associated with offender recidivism. A fundamental issue that can be raised in this area is whether participation in the reentry program should be mandatory or voluntary. An argument can be made that every offender who is either a discretionary or supervised mandatory release case should be required to participate in the reentry program as a condition of release. However, expiration-of-sentence (or “max-out”) offenders represent a significant proportion of the release population and their participation cannot be coerced.

Community Corrections and Offender Reintegration

The RPI has redefined the role of community corrections at key stages of the reentry process. Community corrections staff have become much more involved in institutional treatment decisions, discharge planning, and place-based community supervision strategies. The role of community correction officers in the reentry process is much different for the unconditional releasees, which comprise about 20 percent of all offenders released nationwide each year, than it is for conditional releasees (see Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics, 1999, p. 53). In Columbia, South Carolina’s RPI program, unconditional releasees (which comprise about half of the state’s release population each year) are recruited into the reentry program and are voluntarily supervised on parole caseloads. Other RPI jurisdictions currently are struggling to develop reentry strategies for this population. In these jurisdictions, the role of community corrections has yet to be defined clearly.

It is assumed that community supervision officers will work closely with neighborhood police officers, particularly in the areas of community surveillance and curfew checks. By involving police in the reentry program, it appears that program developers essentially are attempting to improve public safety by adding an additional layer of surveillance (albeit an informal one). Community supervision officers and community police officers are located in the neighborhood-based “cop-shops” where they will share information about offenders in the reentry program. It is expected that information sharing, in conjunction with the location of police and community corrections at the same site, will improve coordination between these two agencies.

In general, reentry program developers have asked community corrections officers to become more actively involved in the institutional treatment and
discharge planning process by meeting with institutional staff earlier and more often regarding the offenders they will supervise upon release. These meetings focus on how to ensure continuity of treatment from institutional to community settings. Although this makes sense for offenders being released conditionally, continuity of treatment is a much more difficult task for the offenders released unconditionally.

For conditional releasees, it is likely that treatment participation will be a condition of release, and it will be the supervising officer’s job to monitor compliance. If the offender refuses treatment or drops out of treatment at some point, it is expected that the supervising officer will do one of two things: (1) convince the offender to return to treatment (utilizing threat of sanctions); or (2) sanction the offender and order him/her to return to treatment. If the informal and formal sanctions fail, the offender would be returned to prison. At this point, it is unclear what role community corrections can and should have with the unconditional prison release population, especially those who refuse to participate in treatment.

RPI program developers recognize the need to provide both supervision and treatment to offenders released from prison. There is a significant number of offenders who will be released from prison unconditionally, and there will be another group of offenders who will be released to the same communities as reentry participants but who are ineligible for the program. At this point, it is unclear what role — if any — community corrections officers can have in the informal supervision and treatment of this first group. Community corrections agencies, however, play an important role in the supervision and treatment of this second group of offenders, which in many jurisdictions include sex offenders, violent offenders, and mentally ill offenders.

Informal and Formal Social Controls

There is a considerable body of research that suggests that informal social controls are more effective than formal social controls as a mechanism for inducing offenders to conform (see Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Byrne, 1989; Byrne & Pattavina, 1992). By “informal” social controls, we are referring to the ties between an offender and his/her family, peers, volunteer guardians, and employers. Offenders conform to the conditions of reentry not only because of the threat of sanctions for noncompliance, but also because of the powerful effect of these informal control mechanisms. Although traditionally we think about community corrections officers as agents of formal social control, a strong argument can be made that they also can act as informal social control agents because of the relationship that develops between an officer and the offender. The proactive community supervision strategies currently being implemented by probation and parole agencies across the country have been designed to emphasize this critical informal social control role (see Taxman & Byrne, 2001). We anticipate that RPI program developers will incorporate the key features of a proactive community supervision strategy into their reentry programs.
Victim Input In the Reentry Process

Up to this point, we have focused on the role of various governmental and nongovernmental agencies in addressing the problems and needs of crime victims. In this section, we discuss how the victim’s role in the offender reentry process has changed in jurisdictions with reentry programs in place. It can be argued that victims’ needs and concerns should be addressed in all three phases of the reentry process. Indeed, this approach to victim involvement is at the core of Burlington, Vermont’s RPI model. Victims want to know whether the offender has changed in prison, what his or her plans are upon release, and perhaps most important, where the offender plans to live and work. By directly involving victims in the reentry process, RPI program developers have given victims access to information and decision making that was previously closed to the public in general and victims in particular.

The RPI programs share a concern for these crime victims and have developed mechanisms not only to keep victims up to date on basic offender processing issues (e.g., arrest status, conviction/plea bargain decisions, type and length of sentence, and release date if incarcerated), but also to provide victims a forum for participating in reentry decision making. This expanded victim’s role has changed the way victims interact with the police. At reentry sites, victims will have much more information about the offender’s status in the community than they would at non-reentry sites. Victims likely would contact the police if they had information on any changes in offender status (e.g., job, housing, and participation in treatment) that would suggest that the offender was in danger of becoming a threat not only to the victim but to the community. Because the victims and the police in several reentry jurisdictions will be participating on community boards that are involved directly in reentry decisions, we anticipate an exchange of information between victims and those working with released offenders.

One issue that must be addressed by RPI program developers is what types of treatment services will be made available to crime victims in targeted communities. A strong argument can be made that from a public safety perspective, treatment services need to be available to both offenders and victims. For this reason, reentry programs that have targeted conditional release offenders often consider victim preferences when establishing specific conditions of community release. However, it is unclear whether subsequent contacts between victims and community corrections officers will be facilitated by this model because community corrections officers continue to have large caseloads, often with a mixed group of reentry and non-reentry offenders. We suspect that the neighborhood-based model developed in Spokane, Washington will allow victims direct access to community corrections officers because these officers are co-located with community police officers in neighborhood “cop shops.”

Victims of crime, along with family members and friends, often have been the most vocal advocates for change in the criminal justice system and
community. The development of RPIs provides yet another example of the link between victimization and advocacy. For most categories of crime, particularly the types of crime that lead to incarceration, offenders and their victims live and/or work in the same neighborhood. In a significant number of cases, they both live on the same street or housing complex, and for certain crime categories (e.g., sex offenses and domestic violence), they actually reside in the same home. This is the reason why offender reentry is such a volatile issue for many victims and victim advocacy groups. For offenders, the release from prison and return home represents a chance for a new life and a new beginning. For victims, the offender’s release offers only memories of previous victimization and fear of retaliation by the offender.

CONCLUSION

The development of RPIs can be attributed, at least in part, to the recognition that public safety is not merely a criminal justice issue. Through the influence of world trends in offender treatment, as well as victim advocacy groups and community organizations, there is a growing recognition that it is critical to put the community back into community corrections, and that building the role of informal social controls is equally important to building the role of formal social controls. By utilizing a combination of community advocates and guardians trained to address the problems and needs of reentry offenders, community boards hope to supplement the formal social controls provided by police, courts, and corrections with the informal social control mechanisms provided in a variety of community contexts (e.g., family, friends, religious institutions, and jobs).

RPI programs in the United States share a common theme: inclusion of nontraditional partners along with improvements in system coordination will result in improved public safety. Of course, it is one thing to talk abstractly about the need for a systems perspective and for “true” partnerships between police, courts, corrections, community, and victims. It is quite another to describe in concrete terms the specific form and content of such a system-wide partnership initiative. However, models of offender treatment do exist globally, and through a comparative analysis of other systems of reintroducing offenders, it is possible to implement context-specific models to better assimilate the growing numbers of former offenders back into their communities in the United States. Ultimately, the final stage in the reentry process would be akin to the recently implemented strategy in England whereby former offenders have their formal records closed after a significant period of time has expired since their release from prison, usually 7-10 years (Petersilia, 2005). The issues raised here regarding the role of the police, institutional corrections, community corrections, treatment providers, victims, and the community offer a clear starting point for future partnership development.
THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

NOTES

1. Contact information: James M. Byrne, Professor, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Massachusetts at Lowell, 870 Broadway Street, Suite 2, Lowell, MA 01854. Telephone: (978) 934-3992. Fax: (978) 934-3077. E-mail: profbyrne@hotmail.com.

2. Contact information: Don Hummer, Professor, Penn State Schuylkill, 212 Administration Building, 200 University Drive, Schuylkill Haven, PA. Telephone: (570) 385-6064. E-mail: dch18@psu.edu.

3. The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) of the U.S. Department of Justice has developed a series of system-wide reentry initiatives that focus on reducing the recidivism of offenders. The initiatives include (a) RPIs: a partnership of criminal justice, social service, and community groups to develop and implement a reentry process; (b) reentry courts, which are modified drug courts based on the ex-inmate; and (c) “Weed and Seed”-based reentry partnerships. The RPI and reentry courts are demonstration efforts that do not include any funding for programming; OJP has provided technical assistance to the eight RPI sites and nine reentry court sites. The eight RPI sites are Baltimore, MD; Burlington, VT; Columbia, SC; Kansas City, MO; Lake City, FL; Las Vegas, NV; Lowell, MA; and Spokane, WA.

REFERENCES


