
ICCA Policy Position on Community Responsibility and Engagement

I. INTRODUCTION

When community leaders and members understand how they can become actively involved in community corrections and what is to be gained by doing so, justice ceases to be a process that is severed from the mainstream of society. When justice is not integrated into the community, it becomes something that is meted out without reference to those who were harmed by criminal behavior. With community engagement, leaders no longer have to count exclusively on professionals outside of the community to ensure accountability, rehabilitation and public safety. Community members will be empowered by learning how community responsibility and citizen engagement can make our system of justice more efficient, effective and meaningful.

When the justice process is isolated from the community, the formerly incarcerated become outsiders who present a threat rather than individuals returning to a role as citizens of the community. The formerly incarcerated who are able to recognize that they retain a sense of dignity and value even though their crimes caused harm to that community are more likely to invest the personal effort necessary to negotiate the challenges of reentry and restoration. As most of these individuals return to the community from which they came, it is in the best interest of the community to facilitate remorse and restoration and it is the community that is in the best position to reinforce the principles of accountability and forgiveness.

II. STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The community has a responsibility to facilitate reintegration by assisting both the victims and offenders who are among their members. Victims can be assisted through crisis intervention, immediate assistance and emotional support, practical assistance in reestablishing a normal life, access to resources, and case management to provide ongoing assistance. They can also benefit from affording offenders an opportunity to make amends for the harms they have caused to them and the community.

The community has a responsibility to make it possible for the formerly incarcerated to achieve successful reentry by forming a reintegrative community. The range and depth of barriers to reentry must be recognized and these counterproductive, discriminatory barriers must be removed. The community can work to reduce the adverse impacts of these barriers on successful reentry by arranging for short-term and long-term supports. Short-term supports address the essentials for survival (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, transportation, drug treatment, identification cards, drug treatment). Long-term supports address the elements of a stable life (e.g., employment, transportation, housing, healthcare insurance, health care, educational development, social services, accepting their civic participation, capacity to form and maintain a family, etc.).

III. RECOMMENDATIONS TO FACILITATE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There are a great many steps that can be taken to facilitate community acceptance of responsibility and community engagement in the justice process. Those who are involved in the business of community corrections need to open their doors (figuratively and literally) and invite community member involvement. Below is a list of steps that can be taken to accomplish citizen engagement:

- Initiate community meetings/Community Relations Boards before specific organizational needs or problems arise;

- Hold regular Open Houses to get neighbors and other stakeholders into community corrections facilities, thereby increasing their knowledge and comfort levels while reducing fear based on lack of familiarity;
- Encourage agency leader and staff representation on local councils and boards of other agencies and associations;
- Make agency experts available for consultation with nonprofits and governmental entities on program and grant development;
- Ensure active participation/leadership in local, state and national advocacy groups;
- Sponsor and/or conduct presentations at community educational events (e.g., impact of legislation, new procedures/techniques, conference kickoff receptions, staff/client presentations) for a wide variety of stakeholders /community groups;
- Organize Community Resource Fairs to bring local service providers face-to-face with the formerly incarcerated;
- Conduct presentations at local universities and colleges;
- Conduct presentations on behalf of the local United Way or other charitable organizations;
- Promote client and staff member involvement in community charitable events;
- Encourage client participation on Victim Impact Panels;
- Support staff and client involvement in neighborhood and community projects (e.g., clean-up, tree planting, graffiti removal); and
- Publicize agency involvement in the community through local media.

When reaching out to specific community members or community groups with the intention of educating them regarding the benefits of citizen involvement in the justice process, there are a number of steps that should be taken:

- Prepare presentation materials that outline the impact of active community involvement on recidivism and public safety;
- Find community opinion leaders that agree with or are at least willing to get others to listen to the notion that communities must accept part of the responsibility for its citizens returning from correctional institutions;
- Ask community opinion leaders to set up meetings with neighborhood associations/other neighborhood leaders, business groups, as well as other people of influence to learn what this means and how the community can play a role;
- Promote informed discussion about the reentry issue and the responsibilities of the community to reduce pressures toward crime and barriers to reentry; and
- Describe the public safety benefits of providing support services to assist the formerly incarcerated to handle the basics of life outside prison (paying bills, buying a car, maintaining a vehicle, buying fuel, buying groceries, healthy family relationships, etc.)

Restorative justice and community justice approaches support community engagement in the criminal justice system. Unlike the traditional justice system approach that is based on the belief that more punishment results in less crime, restorative justice focuses on the harm caused by crime and emphasizes the repair of this harm. Restorative justice elevates the position of victims and the community to direct participants in the justice process instead of relegating them to the status of bystanders. It brings together all of those affected by the criminal act to determine what harm was caused and how it should be repaired. Citizens should identify and support changes in local, state and federal laws that promote earned redemption among those returning from prison by:

- Reducing legal barriers to employment, housing, access to education, etc;
- Promoting restorative principles and practices for responding to non-violent crimes (i.e., most cases) at the front end of the justice system;
- Promoting restorative principles and practices as elements of post conviction sentencing decision makings;
- Promoting restorative principles and practices as elements in pre-release programming and post release supervision;
- Expand the use of parole to provide post-release supervision and support aimed at increasing successful reentry among the formerly incarcerated; and
- Expand the use of restitution rather than incarceration.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

Fostering community engagement and responsibility requires that community corrections agencies manage the offender population in an ethical, responsible manner which fosters community support.

- Community Corrections has the responsibility to ensure swift and certain response to violations of rules or supervision expectations.
- Community Corrections has a responsibility to collaborate with community partners. Community partners are defined as government agencies, law enforcement, non-for profits, treatment providers, business community and community stakeholders.
- Community Corrections has the responsibility with the offender to identify positive, productive relationships which will assist and support the offender's reintegration efforts.

- Community Corrections has the responsibility to work with the academic community to identify through research and statistical data supervision practices which have proven to affect positive offender success.
- Community Corrections has the responsibility to define and not defend effective offender management and supervision practices.
- Community Corrections has the responsibility to seek opportunities to educate the community through public relations events to include public speaking and educational forums.
- Community Corrections has the responsibility to acknowledge that we do not “own” the problem or solution to the issue but rather share the responsibility to collaborate with the community to develop a healthy and safe community.

Reviewed and adopted by the ICCA Board of Directors

Date: January 6, 2010

International Community Corrections Association

8701 Georgia Avenue, Suite 402

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

<http://www.iccaweb.org>