

SITING COMMUNITY RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

One of the most persistent problems in community corrections is the difficulty in siting new residential programs. These same issues often apply to the location of probation offices, too. Both are often seen by the communities in which they are to be placed as presenting dangers to the public safety.

Prison overcrowding and issues of prisoner reentry must be addressed through increasing and enhancing community corrections. To meet the concerns of the public, we must first understand the nature of community concerns, and then tackle them in constructive ways.

What are the Barriers?

Community members have concerns about:

- Increase in crime
- Decline of property values
- Neighborhood business falling off
- Welfare of clients in bad programs
- Mistrust of government
- Lack of program oversight
- Belief that criminals belong behind bars

Community members have fears about:

- Predatory offenders on the loose
- Children and seniors at risk

Saturation of certain neighborhoods, especially areas of poverty

- Reentry issues belong to the whole community; fair dispersal should be a goal
- But, offenders return to their own old neighborhoods, this is natural
- Racism is an issue; we are dealing with economically and racially segregated neighborhoods
- Incarceration is over-concentrated in major cities

Conflicting Goals

Community corrections are seen to be in conflict with the goals of the larger community.

- Underlying issues of racism
- Denial of the burden of halfway houses are perceived to impose upon neighborhoods
- Lack of social will to sustain adequate funding
- Confusion/inter-mixing of criminal justice programs with all other neighborhood grievances

Other issues:

- If clients come from five different neighborhoods, where do you site the program?
- Focus on the one bad apple

- Lack of familiarity with client population
- “Outside agitators” telling the neighborhood what to do

Positive Steps to Take

- Conduct a solid community census identifying location of existing programs
- License, monitor and hold accountable programs to elevate quality
- Improve the quality and scope of requests for proposals for contracts regarding the continuum of care; set higher standards; allow for time to plan
- Arrange for inspections
- Facilitate field visits
- Encourage the development of personal relationships
- Engage the community in front-end dialogue through community forums in which to educate neighbors about the nature and characteristics of clients
- Provide good, true information, research data
- Provide access to the person in charge
- Educate and engage legislators, promoting community corrections as a practical and cost-effective solution and an effective crime reduction strategy
- Provide volunteer community service for projects designated by the neighborhood
- Maintain property in accordance with community standards

Model Program in East Nashville

- Community Organization
- Client-centered planning: assessment shift from risk-based to strength-based
- Adopting the goal of increasing public safety
- Critical role of intermediary
- Utilization of GSI technology (mapping), using data to benefit communities to help people better understand their neighborhoods in a different way
- Research community history, demographics, characteristics
- Involve university resources, religious institutions, criminal justice community involvement (judges, DAs)
- Allow plenty of planning time
- Rely upon models of success
- Publicize the success of individual clients
- Highlight preponderance of non-violent offenders
- Promote inter-agency, inter-governmental communication and collaboration
- Promote government responsibility, commitment to long-term involvement
- Use Community Relation Boards

Summary of Key Principles/Needs

- Honesty
- Communication
- Collective Responsibility
- Focus on public safety
- Stable long-term adequate funding
- Global view on issues of poverty

From the workshop "Siting Community Residential Programs" presented to the American Correctional Association, Tuesday, January 31, 2006

Moderator: Linda Connelly, CEO, Leaders in Community Alternatives, San Francisco, California

Panel presenters:

David Briley, City Councilman, City of Nashville

Mike Jameson, City Councilman, City of Nashville

Jan Kempf, Chief Operating Officer, Dismas Charities, Inc.

Michael O'Neil, Court Referee Metropolitan Nashville

John Stern, Executive Director, Nashville Neighborhood Alliance