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# Working with Offenders

In the firm belief that imprisonment rarely rehabilitates and should be utilized only for those who are dangerous to society, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency has sought to establish programs which treat offenders in the community.

Some years ago NCCD undertook the Saginaw Project in Michigan which conclusively demonstrated that high quality probationary supervision of felony offenders in the community was possible without endangering the safety of the public.

The Community Treatment Project for Repeat Offenders goes one step further. It shows that community services—group and individual counseling, education and training, drug treatment, volunteer help and many others—can be profitably used with felons who have *repeatedly* committed crimes and who otherwise are unable to extricate themselves from the cycle of criminal acts, apprehension, conviction and imprisonment.

The project described in these pages retains offenders in the community at *one-fifth* the cost of imprisonment. Initial results show that only 2.5% of repeat offenders, who would normally be sent to prison but instead were assigned to the project, had to be terminated for new offenses or technical violations. This recidivism rate is far below the national rate of more than 60% and even lower than the rate for regular probationed offenders in the county.

Innovative treatment programs such as the one described here should have the support of public officials, professionals and the general public. These programs save money, break the crime cycle and are more humane. We urge you to consider this project and its application in your community.

MILTON G. RECTOR  
*President*

# **\*Record of a Recidivist...**

*\*This is an actual record of  
an offender in the  
Community Treatment  
Project for Repeat  
Offenders.*

	4/23/52 Petty larceny. 30 days in jail.
<input type="radio"/>	\$160.65 fine and costs.
	8/25/52 Petty larceny. 120 days in prison.
	\$56 fine and costs.
	3/20/53 Burglary. One to 15 years in state reformatory.
	Paroled Sept. 30, 1954.
	11/7/54 Petty larceny. Returned on parole violation and paroled
	April 26, 1957.
	7/18/57 Grand larceny. One to 11 years in state prison.
<input type="radio"/>	10/11/60 Petty larceny. Parole violation and returned to state
	prison until July 2, 1964.
	9/24/64 Grand larceny. One to seven years in penitentiary.
	2/5/68 Grand larceny, \$300 fine and costs and 90 days in jail.
	5/29/68 Petty larceny, 90 days in jail.
	12/4/68 Parole violation.
	10/25/69 Shoplifting. No disposition.
	3/29/70 Petty larceny. No disposition.
<input type="radio"/>	9/8/71 Larceny in a building, subject of this disposition.

From probation officer's report:

"... the respondent appears to have some good qualities, but his age, lack of employment, and previous criminal record weigh heavily against him."

*Lock him up?*

**No, there is another way...**

## The Problem

The repeat offender is the forgotten person in the criminal justice process. Most probation programs concentrate on the first time offender to whom judges usually give a "break" and place on probation. But in direct proportion to the frequency in which a repeat offender is brought before the court, the judge will reject the alternative of probation and sentence him to a prison term.

This was the situation in Oakland County, Michigan, in 1971. Offenders with prior records accounted for almost two-thirds of those arrested, convicted and sentenced by the Circuit Court. Of the 530 offenders sentenced in that year, 25% of the first offenders were sent to institutions, 44% of offenders with one prior conviction went to prison and 75% of offenders with two or more prior convictions were imprisoned.

Oakland County is typical of many areas in the United States. A booming suburban region with a population of nearly 1 million, the county was experiencing the rapid growth of crime typical of the 1960s. Drug use was widespread, crime was spilling over into the county from the ghettos of near-by Detroit, and Pontiac, the county seat with a population of 80,000, had typical urban crime problems.

## Response

The judges of the Oakland County Circuit Court were casting about for ways to help cut crime. They were seeking to strengthen alternatives to prison sentences. At the same time the National Council on Crime and Delinquency was looking for a site to test a project for repeat offenders. NCCD felt that if a Community Treatment Project for Repeat Offenders could demonstrate that repeat felony offenders can be retained and treated in the community at no significant risk to public safety, and if the cycle of offense arrest, conviction and incarceration could be broken, substantial savings in money, manpower and human resources would result. Because Oakland County has the depth and variety of social service resources needed to augment successful intensive probationary programs, NCCD felt that it was a suitable site to undertake the project.

The judges, probation department, prosecuting attorney and county commissioners; the State Corrections Department and Office of Criminal Justice Programs; the NCCD and the Sachem Foundation forged a working relationship to design the program.

The project received funding amounting to \$199,986 in April 1971. Sachem contributed \$86,000; the county commissioners, \$41,000, and the Michigan Office of Criminal Justice Programs, \$62,900.

A Citizens Advisory Committee, with the concurrence of local officials, selected Michael J. Mahoney, a well qualified corrections professional, to direct the program. Mahoney joined the NCCD staff and under his supervision a special unit within the county probation department was organized. Mahoney recruited a staff of four probation officers, a research assistant and two clerks. (Currently, the professional staff consists of five probation officers and two university students, the latter working two days a week). The project began taking offenders in July 1971 and has been operating continuously since that time.

## How the Program Works

The project seeks to aid offenders and maintain them in the community in a number of ways:

It provides casework and group services for offenders in small caseloads, not exceeding 35 per probation officer. Besides intensive one-to-one supervision, offenders are assigned to small task groups of six to 10 offenders. These groups meet periodically to help participants identify problems contributing to their criminal behavior and to plan a course of remedial treatment. This part of the project is described in greater detail below.

The project refers clients to a large variety of governmental and private services. These include drug abuse treatment, vocational rehabilitation, mental health, educational equivalency, technical and job training, college courses, family counseling and employment. Through a grant from the Michigan Office of Criminal Justice Programs, the project also purchases a number of services for clients. These include fees for tuition in educational programs, medical examinations, psychological testing, and certain kinds of counseling.

The project utilizes volunteer services. The project brings in lawyers to provide personal and group legal counseling. A teacher donates his time giving individual and group general equivalency education tutoring. A banker furnishes personal financial and small business counseling. Doctors give free physical examinations. An architect provides vocational information. An optometrist examines clients. A real estate broker from time to time gives counseling on his field. Seminarians from a local college give individual counseling and include project clients in their organized recreational activities program.

## Who the Project Helps

The clients participating in the project have typically been convicted of such crimes as burglaries, stealing cars, creating disturbances, shoplifting and assaultive behavior. A large number of crimes relates to drug or drinking problems. The offenders are generally in their twenties. They are repeat offenders but are not generally violent or dangerous. Rather, they are often confused and immature persons with histories of disrupted family life or poverty. They don't really belong in prison, but because they repeatedly commit crimes they are destined to receive prison terms—unless a special program such as this one can intercede.

In administering the project, NCCD found that not all probationers in the project need intensive supervision. The amount and kind of supervision really depends a great deal on the individual's needs and his problems. In some cases, it's not necessary for a probation officer to see a client more than once a month. In others, the officer has to be in touch with probationers three or four times a week.

Here are some true case histories (only the names are fictitious) taken from the files on the project.

## William

William, 20, was convicted of larceny in a building and placed on probation. He had a long record of juvenile offenses, truancy, possession of alcoholic beverages, violence and reckless driving. Two weeks after his latest conviction he was found in violation of probation, having been found drunk and apparently attempting a second break and entry. The judge gave him a good tongue lashing, but because a project probation officer interceded in his behalf the judge continued probation. Otherwise he would have received three to five years in prison, the officer said.

According to the probation officer, the youth was so grateful that he gave "100% attention to the group meetings which he attended. Due to the group's encouragement, he got a steady job and went back to school. The group encouraged him to continue school despite being constantly cut down by his mother.

"We are advocates for our clients as opposed to being surveillance and enforcement people, as is the case in many probation departments," the officer remarked. "Our work is treatment and prevention oriented."

## Joseph D.

Black and 56 years old, Joseph D., has been in prison half his life. His record began back in 1928 when he was institutionalized for truancy. Most of his prison sentences stemmed from a long history of charges involving larcenies and purse snatching. Finally, an Oakland County judge placed him on five years probation and fined him \$1,000 for an attempted breaking and entering. "He had family trouble and an unhappy childhood," a probation officer reported. "He has a drinking problem."

In a two-month span he had seven contacts with his project probation officer, four office interviews and three group meetings. "The causes of his problem have not gone away and the circumstances are the same," his probation officer reported recently. "But he is keeping out of trouble and we are still working with him. He is a help to us. He has found jobs for five people in the project."

## Dan

Dan, a 29-year-old black, of "dull normal" intelligence, lives with a family composed of 14 brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. He is single, has never been married and has an out-of-wedlock child. He has been unemployed for three or four years. He has a record that includes larceny, aggravated assault, possession of an unregistered gun and two traffic violations.

Dan was referred to the project in November 1971 for attempted larceny. Through the project's individual and group counseling sessions at the Pontiac Neighborhood Service Center he began to focus on his drug related problems, employment possibilities, physical and health impairments and job training programs. Through use of many community resources, he has successfully completed the methadone maintenance program and has had his hearing deficiency treated. Upon early discharge from probation, he will be employed by GMC Truck and Coach Division.

He also wishes to become actively involved in a future responsible role as an assistant in group counseling with project black offenders in the service center. He plans on marrying his girl friend and assuming a father role with his out-of-wedlock son.

## Terry D.

Terry D., caucasian male, 19, and married, has a juvenile criminal record and was in the State Boys Training School from age 16 until his 19th birthday. Prior to that he had been placed on probation with the juvenile court and violated that probation. He ran away from the training school on several occasions. Through the efforts of the project, he has seen a psychiatrist and has been identified as having a possible personality disorder. The project saw to it that he was enrolled in a drug therapy program because he is a self proclaimed heroin addict.

He passed the general education equivalency program and is now enrolled in the Diesel Training Institute.

## Group Counseling Sessions

It's a sociological fact that individuals are greatly influenced by their peers. For this reason, task discussion groups are an integral part of the project. These groups meet periodically to help participants identify problems contributing to their criminal behavior and to plan a course of remedial action. The group then monitors individuals' progress toward solving their problems.

Attendance is flexible, depending on the individuals' needs and schedules. Usually, a client will start out attending once a week. Then the attendance can taper off somewhat, depending on the client's progress. Group sessions are held in community locations in Pontiac and Detroit, besides project headquarters in Royal Oak.

The discussion groups can perhaps best be explained by an account of an actual meeting:



It was a Wednesday night counseling session. Eight clients, all in their early 20s, at least three with drug problems, were "rapping." Attention turned to one participant who seemed to be talking loudest. He was wearing a comical looking felt hat. They commented on the hat.

Pete enjoyed the attention. He continued to talk loudly, basking in his role as the center of attraction.

Probation Officer Tom Jacks, a group coordinator, now began to deftly turn the rapping into a real discussion.

First, he asked Jim to explain the differences between group counseling and rap sessions. Jim repeated that participants in counseling sessions explain, are responsible for self and others, concerned about doing things and making changes, and listen; and each is himself. Members of rap sessions explain away, avoid responsibility, and do what is safest in the group.

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Turning toward Pete, Jacks declared, "You're acting very strangely tonight. Why?"

"I racked up my car the other night," Pete replied. "I guess it's bothering me, besides, what's wrong with me? Can't I have some fun?"

The participants took their cue from Jacks. They questioned Pete sharply.

It turned out, Pete gradually admitted, that he took an illicit drug and while he was high smashed his car. Luckily, no one was hurt, and the police made no arrest. But his auto sustained several hundred dollars worth of damage.

When the pressure gets to be too much, Pete turns to drugs. Born of middle class parents, Pete had a normal childhood, on the surface at least, but he began to turn to drugs at the age of 13, winding up being hooked on heroin. He was in a methadone maintenance program for three years. Just when he seemed to be coming around he'd get impatient and blow it. He'd get a fix—and steal a car or attempt a burglary.

Pete is married and has one small child. His wife is hooked on heroin. She is expecting another child. She recently attempted to take her life. The authorities took away her child. Through the program, Pete has obtained the services of a lawyer to help him get his child back.

Things are tough for Pete. But he did get one break, following his latest arrest and conviction. Instead of being sent to prison, where he would get no individual attention, he was referred to the project.

He began attending group sessions. Through the efforts of the project, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation advanced him funds to enable him to attend a technical school to learn dental technology.

"Let's face it. I hate to say it, but I have middle class values. I want the same things . . . There's good money in making false teeth.

Pete is doing well enough in school, but he's disappointed in himself. "That instructor takes a real interest in me; he really feels bad when I miss a class. He says I'm doing okay, but I don't feel really with it. I know that I can do better."

Pete tries to make excuses. "I haven't really done anything wrong," he says with a lilt in his voice. He is still high from a drug. "If only my parents didn't nag me."

The participants are not sympathetic.

"You can't blame your parents for being upset."

"Do you want to blow this chance you're getting?"

"You're just trying to kid yourself and look for an easy way out."

Pete looks for understanding. He explains that he gets depressed and continues to lack confidence in himself. "I know that I'm doing the wrong things," he finally admits in a crestfallen voice. "I really want to succeed, but then I go out and do a stupid thing like this."

At this point, the conversation turns to another participant who confesses to what might be developing into a drinking problem. "I go out drinking every night. I drink too much. I think I'm becoming an alcoholic," he explains.

Another talks about the methadone maintenance program he is in. He seems to be setting himself straight. He holds a regular job as an auto mechanic.

The conversation turns back to Pete. "We understand your problems," Jack says sympathetically. "But there is a solution. You've got to keep trying. You can't give up."

The participants agree. All seem to take heart. The meeting adjourns and hopefully the participants derive enough sustenance to help them get through another week.

"Man, this is a beautiful program," a probationer remarks as the group leaves. Others agree. "Before this, I never met a probation officer who really cared."

## Results

Initial results point to success. Findings thus far are that *more recidivist offenders than was previously the case can be retained by the community with no increased danger to the public and at far less expense than incarceration.*

According to study figures, it costs *five times* as much for the Michigan Department of Corrections to lock up an offender than it does to maintain him in the project. The costs of imprisoning a single offender for one year is \$3,967, while the project can carry the same offender for \$725 a year.

Of the 164 offenders participating in the project in mid-1973, a total of 80 were from a pool which ordinarily would have been sent to prison. This means that spread over a year the operational saving alone to the prisons would be nearly \$360,000.

In addition, costs of carrying prisoners' families on welfare and loss of sales and income tax revenues, plus other indirect costs, are being saved by keeping these offenders out of prison and retaining them as productive members of the community.

For purposes of research, offenders participating in the project were taken at random from a pre-selected pool of regular probationers and another pool of persons sentenced to prison. The pre-selected pool excluded murderers, rapists and other dangerous offenders. A hallmark accomplishment of the project was an extremely low rate of recidivism of the hardcore experimental prison pool in the project. By mid-1973, only 2.5% of this group had to be taken with a national recidivism rate of 60% to 80%.

The failure rate of probationers receiving project supervision was a disappointing 14%, which was even greater than the 9% failure rate of the control group receiving regular probation supervision. A partial explanation for the higher recidivism rate of the project probationers is that they were under more intensive supervision than regular probationers.

Critically important, however, is that none of the 13 probationers lost to the project were convicted of crimes dangerous to the public. Two were for technical violations of the conditions of probation and the remainder were for crimes against property and drug violations.

## Project Achieves Recognition

Oakland County officials are convinced the project is working for them. Following completion of the two-year demonstration, the county agreed to take over supervision and financing of the project.

After having studied preliminary results, the State Department of Corrections and the Michigan Office of Criminal Justice Programs have endorsed the project and are planning to install it on a statewide basis. As a first step, funds are being sought to open similar projects in Michigan's urban areas. News about the project results is being discussed in professional circles. And now other states are showing interest in replication.

# Let's Move Ahead

At a time when federal, state and local governments are pouring millions of dollars into prison construction, the implications of this NCCD project are enormous.

Whether prisons are antiquated century-old maximum security facilities or new buildings with contemporary facades, in the end they usually do not rehabilitate or correct. They are inhumane. They are costly. They do not cut crime.

There *are* better ways to deal with the offenders, and the Community Treatment Project for Repeat Offenders is one of them. This project is a viable, proven alternative to imprisonment. It needs to be replicated. It behooves government and community leaders to examine it carefully.

The NCCD is prepared to assist any government agency in planning and implementing this model program.

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency, established in 1907, is a non-profit citizen and professional organization which seeks to improve the effectiveness of agencies and programs in criminal justice through studies, demonstration projects, research, surveys, evaluations, model standards and acts, and training.

We welcome your inquiries.

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