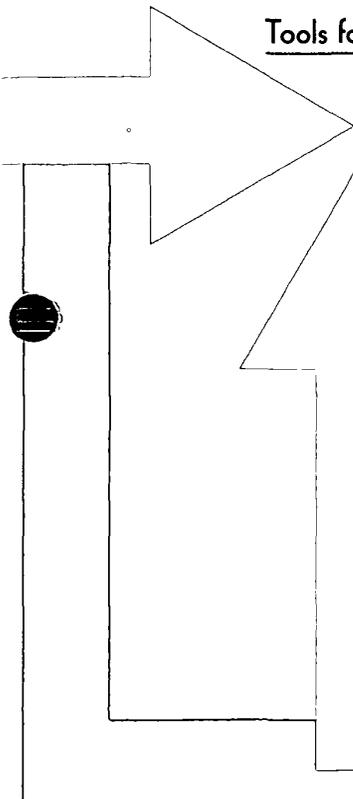


Tools for Building Effective Community Corrections



Creating the Community Connection— And a Constituency in the Process



CCC: A public-private partnership promoting an effective system of community corrections



The Center for
Community
Corrections

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National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)
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Creating the Community Connection— And a Constituency in the Process

By Margot C. Lindsay

CCC: A public-private partnership promoting an effective system of community corrections
October, 2000



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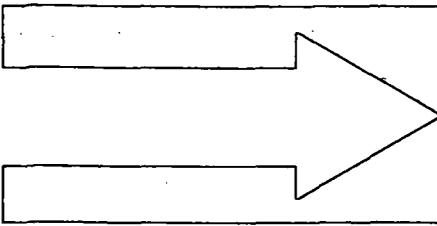
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1	Introduction	1
PART 2	Initiatives, Obstacles and Examples	3
	Your Initiative is the Key	3
	Why Bother?	4
	Why Hasn't It Happened?	5
	Some Examples of Community Collaboration	6
	A Willing Public	7
PART 3	Strategies	9
	Creating the Relationship	9
	... Or At Least a Dialogue	12
	The Potential Constituency	14
PART 4	Critical Elements	15
	Critical Elements in Successful Community Connections	15
PART 5	Resources	19



**THIS PROJECT IS DEDICATED TO THE
FOLLOWING PROPOSITIONS:**

- ❖ That successful community corrections depends on intergovernmental collaboration which recognizes the needs and promises of each level of government;
- ❖ That successful community corrections demands a genuine partnership with the community;
- ❖ That the optimum use of community corrections requires public officials and a public who understand its purpose and are willing to support its programs;
- ❖ That small, relatively inexpensive changes in the right places can do much to increase the likelihood of successful community corrections.



PART 1

Introduction

You are a business person with your head in the sand if you are not concerned about crime and its impact on your business, your customers, and you as an individual.

For about five years I had been concerned about crime and the growth of the prison population.

While I was concerned, I didn't know of any way to plug into the problem and make a difference—
Project Re-Enterprise provided me with that.

Businessman involved with Texas's Re-Enterprise Project

The experience of the Texas businessman is not unique. Most people don't know how to "plug into the problem," yet many would like to be involved. Once told how to plug in, or, better yet, once invited to do so, they are likely to react as positively as businessmen involved in the Re-Enterprise Project.

A CASE IN POINT: A judge wanted to give more offenders community-based punishments so they could repay both victim and community for the harm they had caused. In order to do that he and the local probation office needed the possibility of job referrals and community work sites, and the capacity to follow up on referrals made to both. The director of the local Voluntary Action Center ("VAC") down the street was enlisted to help create a volunteer program under the joint aegis of the court and probation to provide that extra dimension. The VAC director recruited a retired investment banker to lead the effort. He in turn helped recruit a group of fellow retirees—businessmen and service officers. They canvassed the community for potential employers and

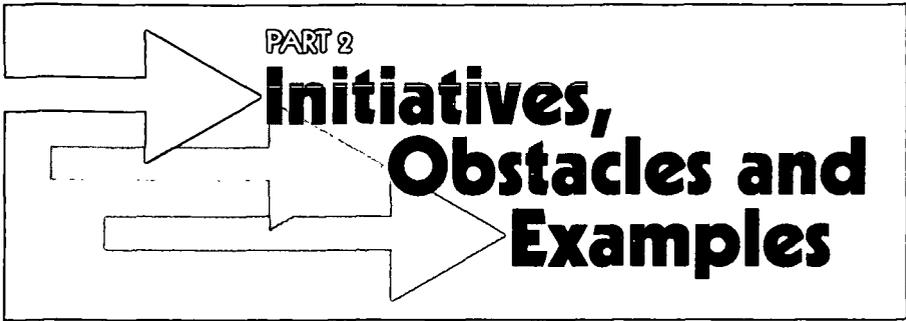
likely community service sites, interviewed probationers sent them by the court or the probation office, and followed up, if placement occurred, to make sure things were going well for everyone involved.

In the process, other activities developed. The retired businessmen came face-to-face with realities they had never experienced. They discovered that many offenders had no idea how to organize their lives for work—that 9 a.m. meant 9 a.m., and that every day meant every day; nor how to conduct themselves at a job interview; nor even in many cases how to read an application. Appalled, they passed on their new-found knowledge to legislators, and lobbied for community corrections funding which would include job preparedness elements.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the importance of developing these types of community connections and the obstacles which stand in the way, to suggest some models and some steps to bring them into being and some resources for those of you interested in proceeding down this road.

PART 2

Initiatives, Obstacles and Examples



YOUR INITIATIVE IS THE KEY

There's no way in which community corrections practitioners can do by themselves all that is expected of them without the understanding, support, and involvement of the public. And there's no reason why they should.

But there's no way in which members of the public can know how to work with the criminal justice system. And there's no reason why they should.

Both "sides" have a common goal of crime-free neighborhoods, and both need each other to achieve that end. Members of the public need offenders, living in their neighborhoods, to be supervised and controlled by experts—your contribution to the public's safety. For its part, the community's contribution can be:

- 1) To create neighborhoods which deter, rather than invite criminal behavior: fixing the broken windows, cleaning up the empty lot, watching out for the vulnerable.
- 2) To make the resources needed to turn offenders' lives around available to those who, like you, work with the offender population: GED or job readiness classes, treatment programs, jobs, community work sites, volunteers.
- 3) To respond to opportunities offered by the criminal justice system—particularly by community corrections—to take part in the system's programs and procedures.

Both "sides" can help each other by engaging together in problem solving activities around mutual concerns.

Someone whose interests were not addressed
in the solution will feel
no obligation to make the solution work. . . .

Dept. of Corrections

Defining the roles of both “sides” must come from you, as well as helping the community understand how these roles can best be played. As the Texas businessman points out, “I didn’t know any way to plug into the problem.” This may be for you an unexpected, perhaps unwelcome burden, but if one accepts that community collaboration is essential to the success of community corrections—and a growing number of people do—then your initiative is needed to make it happen.

And the public will respond. After all, the community is the biggest stakeholder in the criminal justice system, with the greatest interest in its success!

WHY BOTHER?

Because everyone benefits. Building a relationship with the community both expands the capacity of the criminal justice system and allows the public a chance to better understand your issues, needs, and potential. The relationship provides the public an opportunity to voice its concerns and priorities, to understand how, by working together, its safety is enhanced, and to feel its own interests and contribution have been acknowledged.

The openness and accessibility of the process will bring not only increased credibility and respect to you and your agency, but also the ability:

- ❖ to explain to “outsiders” the purposes and programs of community corrections, and the myriad issues with which you wrestle;
- ❖ to gauge the public’s views so that you can be responsive to community concerns and priorities;
- ❖ to incorporate local resources into your agency’s work;

- ❖ to problem solve around issues of common interest;
- ❖ and above all, to develop a constituency, a knowledgeable group of community members, to speak on your behalf, something which community corrections has rarely had but desperately needs.

WHY HASN'T IT HAPPENED?

All too often, despite its name, community corrections has operated unanchored to and unsupported by the communities it serves. Yet once asked for specific collaboration, and exposed to those for whom you are responsible, members of the public inevitably gain an appreciation of the complexities of your work and come to see how they can complement it or contribute directly to it.

Why, then, has it been so difficult for this type of collaboration to become an integral part of the community corrections process? Especially since there is no better avenue to creating the constituency corrections so badly needs, to creating that indispensable, knowledgeable group of citizens who can stand with you to support funding requests and new initiatives, and who can be an invaluable resource in problem solving?

Three possible reasons:

- ❖ The term generally applied to the collaborative process—community involvement—may have something to do with it. It sounds murky and vaguely intrusive. The process would be better termed problem solving with the community around mutual interests, because that's just what it is, a joint solving of problems important both to you and to those who worry about the safety of their neighborhoods, working together for their resolution.
- ❖ Building and maintaining community collaborations takes time, which means agency leadership must value the contribution and devote the resources (chiefly skilled manpower) needed to make the collaboration successful. Agency leadership also needs to understand that community collaboration goes to the effectiveness, not the efficiency, of community corrections.

❖ Neither academic nor professional experiences prepare corrections practitioners to engage the community in these efforts. And little help is offered to those to whom the job is assigned. No wonder so few are really comfortable with the process.

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that:

- 1) without public support, community corrections cannot survive, let alone expand to its fullest potential;
- 2) community collaboration enhances the likelihood that your outcomes will be successful;
- 3) communities need to understand how they can create neighborhoods that deter criminal behavior and contribute to the habilitation of those who do offend; and
- 4) the invitation needs to come from you, the criminal justice practitioner and expert in the field.

SOME EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Community collaboration is not new. But while recognition of its importance is growing, it has yet to become an accepted fact of life in community corrections.

Collaboration has taken a variety of forms, involving businesses, social service agencies, individuals, and, most recently, restorative justice panels. A few examples:

- ❖ Citizen advisory board members have met with county commissioners to urge support for local programs.
- ❖ Dry cleaners have contributed unclaimed clothes to a local drug program for offenders to wear to job interviews.
- ❖ Probation officers, meeting with neighborhood associations in their area, have developed joint strategies for dealing with dilapidated buildings and drug infested street corners.
- ❖ Social service agencies have trained law enforcement and probation officers in how best to deal with the mentally ill and women offenders.

Citizens are more likely to become engaged around a concrete problem perceived to have an immediate impact on their lives than around a generalized concern about community health or social problems.

Corrections administrator

- ❖ More and more members of the community, responding to the growing interest in restorative justice, work with the courts and probation officers to decide appropriate dispositions of court-referred cases, then track progress until the sentence is completed and the offender is “welcomed back into the community.”

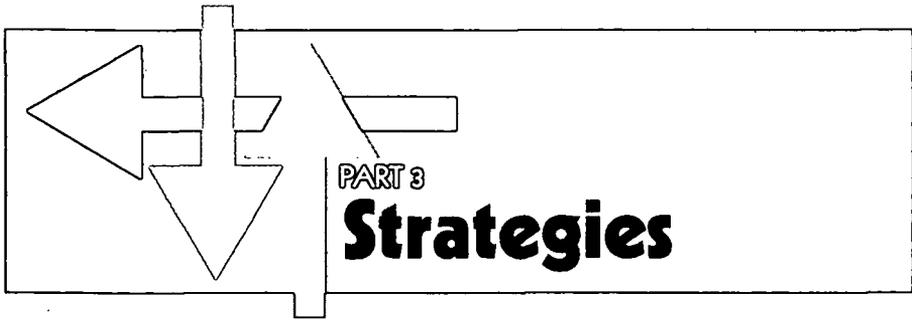
A WILLING PUBLIC

A recent questionnaire asked several business people, educators, religious leaders, and volunteer administrators about their willingness to work with community corrections practitioners. Here are their answers:

- ❖ Every respondent was willing to attend meetings with community corrections officials to discuss common problems around neighborhood crime.
- ❖ Every respondent was willing to help plan programs for the local area.
- ❖ Most were willing to assure access to GED, life skills, and vocational education classes.
- ❖ Most were willing to help monitor and evaluate local programs.
- ❖ Most were willing to help develop volunteer programs to assist community corrections programs.

There is therefore a public willing to respond once your invitation is extended.





CREATING THE RELATIONSHIP

Should you decide to form a community connection, here are some steps to get you started. But take plenty of time to think through any plan you want to implement. Planning is by far the most important part of the whole process.

- 1) Look around to see if there are other agencies in your area that have developed community collaborations and from whom you might gain some valuable tips. Community policing might be a place to start. Mental health, mental retardation and environmental agencies are very likely to have created community linkages of some sort. See what you can learn from them before embarking on your own.
- 2) Start small. Decide on one problem you want to deal with and set realistic goals: ten new job opportunities within the next three months, a GED teacher from the school system for a day reporting center, or six mentors from local churches. Or you may want to gain access to certain community programs such as welfare-to-work or mental health treatment. Identify the group within the community with whom you need to connect: the Chamber of Commerce for jobs, a ministerial alliance for volunteers, etc. Specific, tangible goals are easy to explain and will let the participants know when together you have met them. Afterwards, you can see if you want to expand, change direction, attack a new problem, or forget the whole idea and start on something else!

And as you pursue your own goal, find out the concerns of those with whom you meet, to see how you or your program might address them, or whether there are strategies you and the community, working together, might develop.

- 3) Decide on the who and how. Divide the community into its individual segments: the business sector, the educational and treatment sectors, etc. Identify the group in the community most likely to help you meet your needs and to whose own concerns you need to be responsive: the Chamber of Commerce, the local school system, a ministerial alliance or a particularly active church, a neighborhood association, or a social service agency with community roots. Whatever group you choose should have credibility with peers and the broader public.
- 4) Figure out the staff time required to see whether the capacity within the agency exists to carry out the project. If not, reconfigure the goal so it is achievable with what you have. Any project will require a certain amount of arrangements, reminder calls for meetings, follow-up mailings with minutes or letters of thanks, etc. If the capacity is not there to carry out even a very small collaboration, you may want to limit yourself for the time being to creating the less staff-consuming dialogue suggested further on.
- 5) Explain to your community corrections colleagues what you propose to do and why. Some community corrections practitioners may not understand the importance of community collaboration, and may think there may be unpleasant effects forthcoming from the initiative. Their understanding and support are important to the effort.
- 6) Make an inventory of people already familiar with community corrections and the community who may be helpful in making contacts for you: someone within your own agency, a public official, a board member of a provider agency or of an advisory board, a volunteer in a local program, a friend.
- 7) Use that person to introduce you to someone in the targeted group to whom you can explain your problem, and to get help in explaining what you want to his or her peers. If you have found no one to make the contact on your behalf, make a cold call. You'll be surprised at how intrigued the other person will be to hear from you. You are, after all, offering an opportunity for participation in a critical area of public policy, one totally in the self-interest of your target audience.

Putting together an advisory committee
[of members of the public] was the smartest thing I ever did.

Commissioner of Probation

A CASE IN POINT: A local probation office needed additional supervision for low-level offenders so officers could spend more time on the tougher cases. The two probation chiefs visited the local Chamber of Commerce director to ask which companies in the area were the most public spirited. Three companies were mentioned, and a letter was sent cold to the president of each company, asking the company's involvement in the following experimental program.

A small number of employees would be trained and given ten cases each by the local probation office. Making telephone calls on company time to classes or community work sites or treatment programs, they would find out whether probationers were complying with the terms of their probation. If there was non-compliance, the case would be sent back for probation officers to pursue, and another case sent over.

Two of the company presidents replied cautiously: Come back when you've tried this out elsewhere and it's been proven a success. The response from the third—a credit card company—was immediate and positive. Four supervisors were enlisted, and the experiment proceeded for over a year until the branch office was turned into a training unit and could no longer provide the requisite personnel. (Incidentally, the Chamber director later invited the probation chiefs to address the local rotary—a splendid opportunity for public education!)

- 8) Explore with those with whom you meet, their concerns about crime in their communities, to see if, working together, you can address some of their issues as they work with you to address your own.

A CASE IN POINT: In Arizona, when meeting with a neighborhood association, probation officers learned of the neighborhood's concern about a drug-infested parking area around an abandoned house. Association members, a number of offenders on community service, and probation officers, working together, turned the house into a community center, and even proceeded to set up a neighborhood probation office in it!

- 9) Develop a strategy with the targeted group's leadership to address both your own need and, hopefully, a concern of the group. Send a letter to the group's leader to confirm any agreement.
- 10) Give the initiative publicity both within your agency and in the local media once the initial project—the six jobs, or the agency access, or the neighborhood cleanup—has been successfully completed.
- 11) Maintain the contacts made, and allocate resources specifically to the development and cultivation of other community linkages.

A CASE IN POINT: The California Department of Corrections has Community Resource Managers whose job is to do precisely that.

. . . OR AT LEAST A DIALOGUE

If collaboration seems uncomfortable, you might consider beginning a dialogue with a key group or two in the community. The purpose of the dialogue would be to let their members know of your work and how it is carried out, and to ask them about any concerns they might have of which you or your agency should be aware.

The sociologist Daniel Yankelovich, in his book *The Magic of Dialogue*—a book you will read to your profit—points out that in this period of public alienation, dialogue is enormously welcome and productive. He points to the disconnect between the public and their leaders, and strongly urges some form of reconnection. Creating the community connection via dialogue is certainly one way.

At the very least, you will receive kudos from the participants. As a Hispanic activist told a probation commissioner when invited to be on an advisory group, "I don't know if anything will come of this, but at least you're talking to us!" The outreach is the message.

Most people have two purposes for doing dialogue:
to strengthen personal relationships and to solve problems,
reach decisions and achieve shared objectives.

Today, this second purpose is growing in importance:
increasingly we find ourselves facing problems that require
more shared understanding with others than in the past.

Daniel Yankelovich

A dialogue can be created fairly easily:

- ❖ Attend a board meeting of your provider agencies at least once a year to discuss the programs with which they are involved, and how they fit within the broader community corrections picture. Some program directors may be uncomfortable with the idea of your meeting with their board, but board members represent a potent constituency for you. Moreover, boards are responsible for the programs their agencies undertake, and most board members know less than they should about their agency's programs.
- ❖ Meet on a regular basis with heads of neighborhood associations and the directors of the United Way and Chamber of Commerce to keep them abreast of your issues, changes, and needs, and to explore their own.
- ❖ Attend periodically the meetings of the boards of these organizations for the same purpose.

Even though the primary purpose of the dialogue is an exchange of information and views (with emphasis on the word "exchange"), always be prepared to respond should anyone ask, "What can we do for you?" Any involvement on the participants' part, even though slight, helps to bring your program alive, and tangible benefits can be forthcoming.

SOME CASES IN POINT: Probation leaders and program directors have asked for—and received—help with office furniture, computer equipment for their own computerized needs, offers of space in federal or municipal buildings, and the design of a public education strategy.

Offer some helpful ideas to the group in thinking about their own problems with criminal behavior. If you have offenders performing community service, ask the group how they can best be deployed as a resource for the area. Have a handout explaining your activities which

you can leave behind, and invite your audience (assuming it's not in the hundreds) to visit your office or program at some date in the future.

Regardless of the outcome of these dialogues, you will at least have had a chance to tell your story and to listen to the concerns of your audience. And the dialogue will be welcome. More than one neighborhood association in a high crime area has expressed the wish that probation officers come to their meetings and discuss how association and probation might work together to everyone's benefit.

THE POTENTIAL CONSTITUENCY

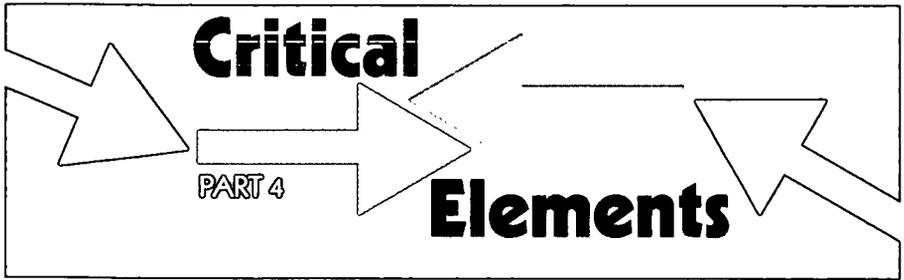
A constituency is a group of knowledgeable members of the public who can stand with you in support of new initiatives or funding, and can serve as educators of the public and media to explain your agency, or incidents, or the needs of your clients. Other sectors, such as the environment and mental health and retardation, have long had such constituencies. Unfortunately, community corrections does not.

Those within the community with whom you establish an ongoing relationship can become that constituency. As did the retired investment banker and his colleagues in the earlier example, they will have a chance to see first-hand, the needs of and the opportunities offered by your programs. And they can then attest to those needs and opportunities to policymakers and funding sources.

But unlike the investment banker, not everyone will see their role as advocate.

A CASE IN POINT: A member of a restorative justice panel was deploring the closing of a local treatment program for juveniles and young adults. But it never occurred to her, although she was highly political, that she and her fellow panel members could advocate, with a significant and credible voice, for the reinstatement of the program, along with other needed services.

Sometimes, therefore, the opportunities to effect change will have to be pointed out. If you are not comfortable doing that, bring in a volunteer from elsewhere who understands the role, to deliver the message.



CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

No matter what form of collaboration or dialogue you decide on, certain elements should be present:

- ❖ Every encounter should be a learning experience for everyone involved. Members of the public will learn about community corrections, but equally, practitioners will learn about the perceptions, concerns and priorities of the public.
- ❖ Similarly, everyone's need must be addressed. As you extend the invitation, select the initial problem or subject matter to be addressed. Be very clear about what you hope to accomplish, but encourage the members of the public present to come up with topics of their own for collaborative problem solving.

A CASE IN POINT: In a program called Safety First in Lowell, Massachusetts, law enforcement officers, public officials, and members of the business community and neighborhood associations meet to identify types of crime and neighborhoods where they occur. They then develop a common strategy for a particular area with the goal of "making Lowell the safest city in the country." Research and evaluation for the group are provided by the non-profit organization Community Resources for Justice.

Following Lowell's example, and building on the success of Operation Spotlight, members of the community could be included by police and probation officials in deciding what areas and crimes should have priority, and what role the community can play in addressing them.

Patience and understanding are needed until you get trust.
Some groups never get past the storming in the forming,
norming, storming, performing process.
Few have the tenacity to see it through.

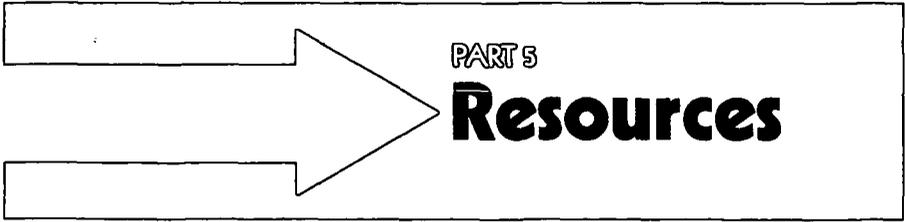
Half-way house official

- ❖ Trust must develop for the collaboration to succeed. Trust takes time to build, and no time at all to destroy. This is particularly true in communities where distrust of government and law enforcement is prevalent. Ongoing meeting/dialogue needs to take place with the same core group, and over time, in order to develop that trust. A changing cast of characters or a one-time meeting are not likely to achieve that result on either side.
- ❖ Members of the public need direct access to a decision maker, unless, as in Lowell, they are part of the decision making group. If members of the public feel they cannot have an impact because they are dealing with an individual unable to make decisions, they will rapidly lose interest.
- ❖ Participants need sufficient information to be able to participate effectively: a clear picture of the nature of the issue or topic to be addressed, why it's in the participants' interest and in the interests of the broader community, the extent of the immediate collaboration, and what is expected of them as well as what they can expect of you and your agency.
- ❖ A response to every suggestion and request assures participants they are being heard. Suggestions need not be taken, but an explanation of why they weren't will help develop trust. If members of the public ask about issues that you cannot discuss—particular cases or complaints about particular staff members—tell them diplomatically but firmly why those are internal matters only, and explain the reasoning behind the policy.

Logically, then, the community belongs with community corrections. A solid relationship between the two can ground your agency in the particular climate and resources of the area you serve. The relationship will help the area safeguard itself with preventive actions, allow you to share local resources, to problem solve together, or at the very least, to speak to one another with mutual respect and support.

Is creating the community connection worth the effort? Experience has shown the answer is yes. You must be the catalyst and initiator, but the public is ready to respond to your invitation. And the ability to tackle common problems together can't help but make the neighborhoods safer and your own work better appreciated and more effective.





PART 5
Resources

Some materials you may find helpful:

Two excellent publications from the APPA:

AMERICAN PROBATION AND PAROLE ASSOCIATION
c/o The Council of State Governments
P.O. Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-1910
606-244-8203

Restoring Hope Through Community Partnerships: The Real Deal in Crime Control—a handbook specifically for community corrections.

Community Justice Concepts and Strategies—“designed to provide the reader with a basic understanding of community justice and strategies for community engagement.”

Three publications which deal with models of court initiatives which can be easily adapted to community corrections purposes:

NATIONAL CENTER FOR STATE COURTS
200 Newport Avenue
Williamsburg, VA 23185
757-253-2000

Rottman, Efke, & Casey, *A Guide to Court and Community Collaboration*, National Center for State Courts, 1998

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102-3660
415-865-4200

Judicial Council of California, *Courts Reaching Out to Their
Communities*, Administrative Office of the Courts of
California, 1999

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION
750 N. Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, IL 60611-4497
312-988-6138

Committee on State Justice Initiatives, *Justice Initiatives: the
Courts, the Bar and the Public Working Together to Improve the
Justice System*, American Bar Association, 1999

And a publication which deals with collaborations from six different
perspectives:

Center for Community Corrections, *Partnerships in Corrections*,
1999

There are organizations that have done a lot with community collabo-
rations, that can help think through possibilities and issues, and can put
you in touch with others who are engaged in interesting outreach.
These include:

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CORRECTIONS
Community Corrections Division
Contact: *Phyllis Modley*
320 First St., NW
Washington, D. C. 20534
800-995-6423

CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION
Contact: *Jimeno Martinez*
351 West 54th Street
New York, NY 10019
212-397-3050

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

Contact: *John Calhoun, Executive Director*

1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 13th Floor

Washington, D.C. 20036

202-785-1595

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR JUSTICE

Contact: *John Larivee, Executive Director*

79 Chandler Street

Boston, MA 02116

617-482-2520

(The organization responsible for the Lowell "Safety First" project)

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About the Center for Community Corrections

The Center for Community Corrections is a broad coalition of former public officials, researchers and correctional professionals representing local, state, and federal concerns. The Center was created in 1987 to promote the overall concept of community-based sanctions as well as specific program options.

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