

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-role-for-community-corrections-in-a-sentencing-alternative-for-parents>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Part two of a three-part series.

Community corrections officers (CCOs) working with offenders in the Family Offender Sentencing Alternative (FOSA) and Community Parenting Alternative (CPA) in Washington State are forging ahead with a new approach to supervision.

FOSA and CPA are [alternatives to confinement](#) that provide eligible offenders with an opportunity to parent their minor children in the community under intense supervision instead of doing prison time. While this program is showing early success in reducing recidivism, it requires a great deal of dedication and time from staff to monitor the program participants in the community.

Community corrections officers in the program have smaller caseloads than a typical CCO to allow them to spend more time with offenders during field contacts. These CCOs say the increased time commitment to each offender is the biggest change from traditional supervision. For example, every offender gives his or her CCO an itinerary of weekly activities for approval and verification. The CCOs also review grocery receipts so they can teach offenders about proper nutrition for their children. If an offenders pre-approved schedule changes, he or she must notify the CCO regardless of the hour of the day or night. Since few CCOs have FOSA/CPA caseloads, they end up traveling long distances to meet with program participants.

CCOs provide much more than directives they coach and mentor offenders about their interactions with their children. While a typical CCO might only meet the offenders children if they happen to be home during a field contact, the programs CCOs develop relationships with the children and other caregivers and learn about their family dynamics in order to better support the supervision plan. They engage in conversations with offenders about day-to-day activities with children, gauge stress levels in families, and provide immediate feedback regarding parenting, discipline, and other skills to enhance the offenders ability to be an effective parent.

FOSA/CPA case management is truly different from a typical caseload of DOC offenders, said Community Corrections Officer Amy Baddgor. We not only have to focus on community safety and the clients risk factors, we also have to look at the needs of their children and how we can assist the client in becoming a positive and effective parent.

The connection to the community is another element that is different from traditional supervision. CCOs work with offenders on how to participate in their communities. Do they have a library card? Can they be involved in their neighborhood watch? Are they participating in community events? Can they volunteer at their childs school? If so, they are encouraged to do so.

This unique approach to supervision culminates with the strategy of solution-based case management as opposed to deficit-based assessments. Instead of telling them where they have failed, the officers identify what has worked for the offenders in the past and focus on expanding those strengths.

Although the officers are challenged by these new roles, they are able to balance family unification with addressing violations of supervision. Their commitment to providing family transitional planning and adhering to the intensive model of supervision has contributed to our programs success.

Susie Leavell is program administrator of the Washington State Department of Corrections.

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