
From Risks to Assets: Toward a Strengths-Based Approach to Juvenile Justice Reentry into the Community

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Transitioning back into the community from a juvenile residential treatment facility, such as the one pictured here, is often a lonely, difficult process. To complete the transition without returning to crime, young men and women need extensive support and resources.

Scholars and policymakers with an interest in the justice system have increasingly turned their attention to the movement of prisoners back into society upon completion of their sentences. The enormity of the prison population in the United States (approximately 1 in 100 adult Americans is currently behind bars), combined with the ever-growing number of ex-offenders returning to communities and extremely high recidivism rates, has fueled interest in “reentry.”

Although *adult* reentry has received considerable scrutiny, the transition of young people out of juvenile justice facilities and into communities has not. One obvious reason for this blind spot is that the number of adults in prison dwarfs the number of juveniles in “residential placement” (the official term for youth residential correctional facilities). In 2006, the number of youths in residential placement nationally was 92,854, whereas the number of adults in prison was 1,570,861 (Minnesota accounted for 1,221 of the youths and

9,108 of the adults).¹ Although their numbers are much smaller than those for the adult prison population, young people regularly return to communities after months or years under

¹ Melissa Sickmund, T.J. Sladky, and Wei Kang. *Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, 2008. Available at www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/cjrp/; Heather Couture, Paige M. Harrison, and William J. Sabol. *Prisoners in 2006*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, December 2007. Available at bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=908.

lock-and-key. Therefore, even though juvenile justice reentry is not as large an issue as adult reentry (at least in terms of raw numbers), it is of terrific importance to ex-offenders, the communities to which they return, and society in general.

In 2007, we began a long-term longitudinal study, the Juvenile Justice Transitions Project, to better understand juvenile reentry. The research included two phases. In the first, we interviewed a racially diverse group of young men before they left their residential correctional facility. We then sought to interview all of the participants in the original sample two times after they returned to their communities: at three months and nine months post-release. In the second phase of our research, we followed six young men for nearly three years after release. Within the first year, the six participants' paths were already clear: two were doing very well, two were getting through probation but not doing well, and two were involved in crime again. By closely following these six cases, we hoped to tease out both the explicit and subtle factors that shaped the individuals' post-release paths. As of this writing, we are nearly finished with the second phase of the study.

This article begins by reviewing two different approaches that probation officers can take when interacting with juvenile ex-offenders. We then present two extended case studies to demonstrate how these different approaches can affect the feelings and trajectories of ex-offenders. We conclude with some policy recommendations aimed at improving the probation officer–juvenile probationer relationship. The research upon which this article is based was supported in part by a grant from CURA's Faculty Interactive Research Program.

Probation Officer–Probationer: A Pivotal Relationship for the Juvenile Offender's Transition into the Community

Research on adult reentry maintains that former offenders' relationships with parole officers² are central to parolees' transitions back into communities.³ Although research on juvenile reentry

² Post-release supervision in the adult criminal-justice system is called parole and post-release supervision in the juvenile justice system is called probation.

³ For a classic statement on this topic, see J. Irwin, *The Felon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

has acknowledged the importance of the relationship between the probation officer (PO) and ex-offender, it has not thoroughly examined that relationship.⁴ To our knowledge, no qualitative longitudinal studies have analyzed this relationship, but from the beginning of our study (particularly as we conducted the first pre-release interviews), it was clear that the PO–probationer relationship was pivotal in the transition process. It was also evident that this relationship differed significantly across the cases, and how it differed mattered. We found that ex-offenders were responsive to and had positive feelings about POs who engaged them in ways that resembled the “strengths-based” approach to juvenile justice reentry. The young men were less responsive to and had more negative feelings about POs who seemed to take a “risks/needs-based” approach. Our findings support recent scholarship that advocates for expanding the use of strengths-based practices in juvenile justice.⁵

Risks/Needs-Based v. Strengths-Based Approach. That said, the risks/needs-based approach is predominant within contemporary juvenile justice. Here the PO focuses on the ex-offenders' problems (also called needs, risks, failures, or deficiencies). The PO instructs the young person on what he or she needs to do to fix these problems. If the ex-offender fails to follow the plan, the PO uses threats and sanctions to get him or her back on track. By remedying or shrinking the problems, the ex-offenders become less at risk for committing new crimes. It is a top-down approach in which the PO is the expert who instructs the young person and the probationer's job is to follow the plan.⁶

The strengths-based approach differs from the risks/needs-based approach in key ways. As its name suggests, this method focuses on youths' strengths or assets. William Barton explains,

⁴ The one exception is M. Jacobs, *Screwing the System to Make it Work: Juvenile Justice in the No-Fault Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁵ W. Barton, “Incorporating the Strengths Perspective into Intensive Juvenile Aftercare,” *Western Criminology Review* 7 (2006): 48–61; M. Clark, “Brief Solution-Focused Work: A Strengths-based Method for Juvenile Justice Practice,” *Juvenile & Family Court Journal* 47 (1996): 57–65; D. Kurtz and T. Linnemann, “Improving Probation through Client Strengths: Evaluating Strength Based Treatments for at Risk Youth,” *Western Criminology Review* 7 (2006): 9–19.

⁶ M. Clark, “The Problem with Problem Solving: A Critical Review,” *Journal for Juvenile Justice and Detention Studies* 10 (1995): 30–35.

“strengths-based practice builds upon an assessment process that seeks to discover strengths and engage in collaborative planning.”⁷ Michael Clark elaborates on this point: “All offenders and families have some resources such as skills, capabilities, interests, positive character traits, even perseverance and hope, that can be brought to bear for exiting our system. It is a simple yet profound truth that solutions are not reached through [an] offender's weaknesses and failures, but through [an] offender's strengths and healthy patterns.”⁸

Whereas the risks/needs-based approach is top-down, the strengths-based approach is collaborative. Barton explains: “A fundamental assumption of strengths-based practice is that people are more likely to change when they are fully engaged as partners in the process of identifying goals and strategies for their attainment, rather than when they are the objects of change efforts initiated by others.”⁹ In a strengths-based relationship, the PO listens to the probationer, makes plans with him or her, recognizes progress (however small), and helps the ex-offender find resources that help him or her reach his or her goals. The PO encourages and seeks to empower the probationer, using threats and sanctions only to enforce serious violations of probation guidelines (and even then the PO can use strengths-based practices to ensure future compliance with the guidelines).

By focusing on ex-offenders' strengths, providing support and recognition, and collaborating with them, POs can build trust and, ideally, increase ex-offenders' willingness to hear and heed advice and instructions (such as the need to follow probation guidelines). As the next section suggests, POs who adhere to a risks/needs-based perspective risk alienating their charges, enhancing their distrust and resentment of them and the justice system more generally, and encouraging them to withdraw or, even worse, see crime as a reasonable option once again. Strengths-based practice is not a panacea; however, its proponents argue that it can help ex-offenders successfully complete probation and

⁷ W. Barton, “Incorporating the Strengths Perspective into Intensive Juvenile Aftercare,” p. 53.

⁸ M. Clark, “Brief Solution-Focused Work: A Strengths-based Method for Juvenile Justice Practice,” pp. 57–58.

⁹ W. Barton, “Incorporating the Strengths Perspective into Intensive Juvenile Aftercare,” p. 53.

become stable and self-reliant, thereby decreasing the risk that they will return to crime.

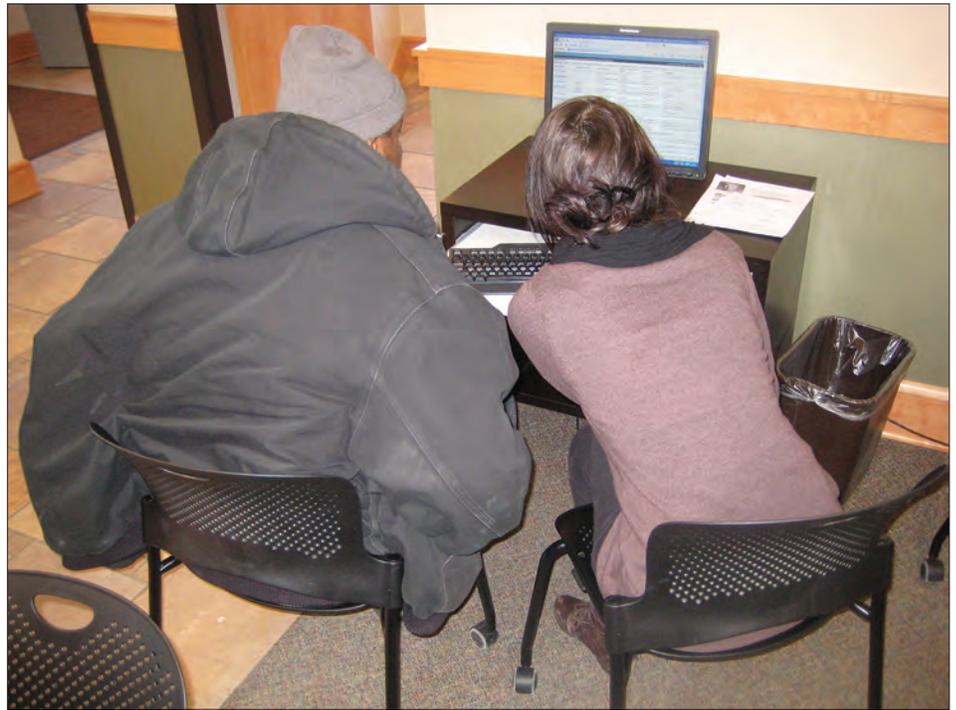
Research Methodology

To conduct this study, we chose to interview young men who resided in either state or county facilities. The Minnesota Department of Corrections granted approval to interview young men at the state facility, which is located approximately 60 miles from the Twin Cities. For young men residing in county-run facilities, we focused on facilities supervised by Hennepin County, the largest county in the state. A court order from the presiding juvenile court judge in Hennepin County granted approval to interview youth at three county-run facilities. We focused on these particular facilities both because of their location (representing an urban, suburban, and rural location), and also because of their focus on long-term programming that paralleled the length of stay and demographics of the young men residing at the state correctional facility.

To identify young men who were eligible for our study, we solicited the assistance of the transitional case manager at each facility. Eligibility to participate in the study was based on two selection criteria: age (18 years or older) and proximity to release (30 days prior to release). The transitional case manager at each facility contacted us on a rolling basis whenever young men matching our selection criteria were eligible for the study. Participation in the study was completely voluntary.

Our intention was to recruit 50–55 participants for the study. We intended to interview each person 4 times: 30 days pre-release and 3, 9, and 18 months post-release. Ultimately, 54 young men between the ages of 18 and 21 (all of the participants were minors when they entered the facility) agreed to participate in the study. Of the 54 young men we interviewed, roughly half (28) were at the state-run facility, and the other half (26) were at one of the three county-run facilities. Age, race, and type of offense were similar for the young men exiting both facilities.¹⁰

¹⁰ Of the juveniles exiting the state facility, approximately 86% were minority whereas 88% of the juveniles exiting the county-run facilities were minority. Race and ethnicity were self-reported by each juvenile during the consent process. We classify as minority juveniles who self-identified as Black, Native American, Hispanic, Asian, or Other (non-white).



After completing probation, Jerome remains unemployed. Here he meets with a counselor at a local nonprofit employment assistance center. The counselor shows Jerome that the young man's juvenile record is publicly available, which may help explain his inability to find work.

The pre-release interviews took place in private rooms provided by the facilities. Upon meeting each young man, we reviewed the purpose of the study and asked them to sign a consent to participate form. Both the pre-transition and follow-up interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to more than an hour. The length of the interviews varied due to the open-ended structure of the interview guide; topics we explored with each individual included:

- ▶ **institutional history**—a timeline of current and past institutional placements
- ▶ **current institutional structure**—treatment, groups, family therapy, chemical-dependency programming, education, employment training
- ▶ **institutional opinion**—critique of current placement, including pros and cons
- ▶ **offense history**—both prior offenses and offense leading to placement
- ▶ **visitation**—types of contact with family and friends while in placement
- ▶ **family life, children, intimate relationships**
- ▶ **peers**
- ▶ **probation**—the influence of probation supervision on future decision-making
- ▶ **goals for the future**

The follow-up interviews took place in the young adult's community, often at a local coffee shop, restaurant, or public space. During the consent process at the pre-transition interview, we secured contact information for each participant, including personal telephone numbers and addresses, along with phone numbers and addresses for family, friends, and case managers. The post-release interview guide includes general topics related to the participant's transition, including family, friends, education, employment, probation, and community activities.

We were able to conduct three-month follow-up interviews with 70% of our sample. Of the 20 young men we were not able to interview at the three-month follow-up, only one individual declined to participate. For the remaining 19 young men, we were either unable to locate them after multiple attempts using the contact information provided on their consent form, or they did not show up for three or more scheduled follow-up interviews.

As previously mentioned, we initially planned to interview the entire original sample at least four times; however, we were able to conduct nine-month follow-up interviews with only 40% of the original participants. Because of the small size of our sample after the first post-release interview, we decided it would be more productive

to follow a small group of participants more closely. We selected six participants (three Black, three White) to follow over time. These six participants were similar in key ways—they had committed serious crimes, had similar sentences, and had been involved in crime for at least a few years before they were apprehended—but differed in their post-release trajectories and experiences. We have interviewed each of the six participants 4–8 times during a roughly three-year period. Our goal is to conduct at least five interviews with each of the six young men, a task we expect to complete in the next few months.

Case Studies

In this section, we provide the case studies of two of the six participants in our study who we followed for almost three years. As noted above, the six young men we tracked had different post-release experiences. The two cases we include here represent two young men who we would characterize as getting through probation but not doing well (although not involved in crime again). The first case is an example of a risks/needs-based PO-probationer relationship and the second is an example of a strengths-based PO-probationer relationship. We do not argue that the POs purposefully tried to develop these kinds of relationships (although they may have). Rather, we maintain that the relationships resemble those we have described above. How the ex-offenders perceive and feel about these relationships, we maintain, had important implications for their reentry process.

Jerome.¹¹ Jerome fits the image of the stereotypical “street criminal.” He is young, black, and stout. He wears baggy pants, hooded sweatshirts, and sneakers. His face and deportment express toughness and fearlessness. His behavior used to match his appearance: he sold drugs, gang-banged, fought, and robbed houses. “Trouble” was a central feature of his life—and, for the most part, he enjoyed it. He explained:

At the time, I just got a kick out of it I guess, kind of liked the trouble.

In early 2007, his criminal escapades stopped when he was locked up for robbery in the first degree with possession of a firearm. Then 17 years old, Jerome was sent to a residential correctional facility, where he would serve an

open-ended sentence (i.e., facility staff would release him once he sufficiently completed the treatment program).

When we met Jerome in January 2008, he had been incarcerated for eight months. Although he longed to be home with his mother (he is definitely a *momma’s boy*), he spoke fondly about his experience in the residential facility. During his time there, he had developed skills for avoiding confrontation, managing his anger, and, to a lesser extent, assuaging his intense grief. His grief was primarily due to the recent murder of his father, who was shot and killed shortly after completing a 16-year prison term.

Jerome was determined to refrain from gang-banging, drug-dealing, and other criminal activities. He was also committed to meeting the expectations of the treatment-facility staff, PO, and judge. He had been a pot-smoker before getting arrested, but now he had not gotten high for more than a year. He aimed to remain sober when he was released—not because he thought he had a drug problem, but because he knew his PO would test him for drugs. He also planned to get his GED and earn a post-secondary degree.

After I get my GED and stuff like that I’m gonna go to a tech school, and I either wanna do mechanics or construction ‘cause I can do a lot of stuff with my hands ... After that I still wanna go to school, like a four-year college or something like that.

Jerome was confident that he would help provide for his family (mother and brother) and establish a conventional, good life “on the outs.”

The young man had a big incentive to stay out of trouble: a four-year adult prison term hanging over his head. The state had sentenced Jerome under a 1995 law called “extended jurisdiction juvenile” (EJJ), which allows judges to blend a juvenile disposition with a stayed adult sentence. Lawmakers envisioned EJJ as an alternative to sentencing young offenders to adult prison for serious crimes. Under the law, judges may sentence juvenile offenders to serve time in juvenile correctional facilities and, upon release, remain on intensive probation (post-release supervision) until their 21st birthday. During this intensive probation period, if the juvenile commits new crimes or technical probation violations, a judge may revoke the juvenile disposition and impose the stayed adult sentence (i.e.,

send the young person to prison) based on the Minnesota adult-sentencing guidelines for the initial offense. Moreover, if the EJJ sentence is revoked, the juvenile adjudication converts to a felony conviction on their adult (permanent) record. Therefore, for Jerome to stay out of prison and maintain a clean adult record, he had to remain crime-free and follow the rules set forth by the juvenile court.

We met with Jerome again approximately three months after he left the youth correctional facility. He was living with his mother and younger brother in a small apartment. Life on the outside was far harder than he had anticipated. When we asked how he was doing, he shook his head slowly and practically groaned, “Stressful, man.” Stress came primarily from working and providing for his family. The young man had two part-time jobs, one at a fast-food restaurant and the other at a casual restaurant/sports bar. He made slightly more than the minimum wage and worked erratic hours.

Jerome’s mother had been out of work since he was released. Therefore, he was primarily responsible for meeting his family’s financial obligations. Heavy with frustration, he told us:

It’s been hard. All I really do is work. Basically all I do is work to pay rent. All the money goes to the bills.

He had not progressed toward earning his GED. Although he was discouraged and tired, he had not returned to crime. He got along relatively well with his PO; as long as Jerome had a job (or actively sought work) and did not get in legal trouble or flunk a drug test, the PO was hands-off. Jerome did not feel that the PO was helpful, but he was happy the officer did not micromanage his life.

We interviewed Jerome again about six months later, and his situation had not improved. He still had his precarious jobs and was spending the vast majority of his paycheck on bills. He had not earned his GED and his social life was negligible. His relationship with his PO had deteriorated, because Jerome had been smoking marijuana. When we asked why he started smoking marijuana (a probation violation), he said:

I guess when I get stressed out man, that’s what I fall back into it, man.

As a consequence of the violation, Jerome was placed on house arrest for a month (he was still allowed to work).

¹¹ The names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Even though he had been caught using drugs, Jerome remained confident that he would complete his probation sentence. After all, he was leading a crime-free life (except for smoking marijuana). He had transitioned from a juvenile gangster into a young adult male who (like many other men his age) worked hard and blew off steam by getting high. At the end of the interview, he told us that he felt “like an old man.” Indeed, he looked like he felt. Nevertheless, he remained mildly optimistic about his future. When we asked him what he thought he would be doing in a year, he replied:

Hopefully, probably learning a trade or something like that. Getting a better-paying job, man.

Our third interview with Jerome occurred approximately a year-and-a-half after we first interviewed him (nine months since the previous interview). He was irritable and disheartened, and his physical appearance had not improved since we last met. Three main things contributed to his mental and physical state. First, he was jobless, having been laid off from both part-time jobs. Second, he was homeless. His family was evicted from their apartment for not paying the rent. Jerome had been “couch-hopping” for a couple of months. His mother was staying in a homeless shelter, and his brother was staying in the shelter with his mother on some nights and with friends on others. Finally, he had a new PO, because his previous PO was on temporary leave. Jerome felt the new officer was unhelpful, especially in aiding Jerome’s job search:

I asked my PO for assistance. I go fill out applications every day, I fill ‘em out on the Internet, and there’s nothing.

He also felt that the new PO micromanaged his life and treated him like a child:

I’m tired of my POs trying to tell me what to do. I’m 20 years old, I know what the fuck I’m doing. The only reason they talk to me like that is I’m on this juvenile probation ... Probation will ruin your life.

The PO routinely pressured Jerome to attend chemical-dependency classes and threatened to revoke Jerome’s probation if he did not quit smoking marijuana. Jerome maintained that he did not have a drug problem; rather, marijuana



Like other government agencies, community corrections departments have increasingly limited resources, which makes it difficult for probation officers to implement strengths-based practices.

helped him deal with stress, grief, and other emotions. The PO also pressed Jerome to attend GED classes. The young man insisted that he was studying for the GED on his own and did not need the classes. As evidence, he pointed to the positive results of a practice test he took the last time he went to the GED class. As he did in our previous meetings, Jerome insisted that all he needed was a decent job. He could then establish a modicum of stability. As he put it:

I just get tired of just dealing with the whole shit. If I was working, I’d be cool.

In short, Jerome felt that the PO did not listen to him, understand his situation, or provide useful assistance or positive reinforcement. Unlike in our previous interviews, at 18 months out, he was not confident that he would complete his probation term, which would end in approximately eight months (when he turned 21). He was ambivalent about his situation, saying,

I don’t even care no more—sometimes.

After reflecting on his situation for a minute or so, he concluded that he would have to stop smoking marijuana:

If I get off the weed, what can they say?

Once his probation was over, he would reignite his habit. With excitement and defiance, he pronounced:

My 21st birthday, I’m going to have fat blunts waiting for me. I got no problem with it [marijuana]. I still function the same way. When I smoke, I actually sit back and read a book.

Jerome envisioned a mellow, stable post-probation future, in which he worked at a trade, smoked marijuana, and spent time with his family and friends. Gang-banging and serious crime were not part of his vision.

At the insistence of his PO, Jerome completed a court-ordered chemical-dependency outpatient treatment program. He remained drug-free long enough to complete his probation sentence. We met with him several months later and asked him to reflect on probation. He acknowledged that probation was a deterrent:

It gave me something in the back of my head, like if you do this you’re going to get in trouble. It made me not even want to take the risk of

getting into trouble ... I hated it, but it kept me out of trouble.

Although he felt probation helped keep him out of prison, he did not think his POs had offered sufficient assistance (particularly with finding the type of work he wanted) or recognized his progress. He was resentful because he felt they had not listened to him.

When he was discharged from probation, Jerome's POs told him that he could contact them for assistance in the future. We asked Jerome if he would take them up on their offer, and he said:

They didn't even help me when I was on probation. So it would be a waste of time to call and see when I'm off.

The POs did in fact help him stay out of prison and complete probation but, from Jerome's perspective, they did not help him find steady work (preferably doing a trade or manual labor) and steady housing, the two things he felt were essential for establishing stability and happiness.

Michael. Michael's story overlaps with Jerome's in key ways. Both transplants from Chicago, these young black men grew up in poverty and without fathers. They became involved with gangs and crime at young ages and were locked up before finishing high school. After receiving EJJ sentences, they ended up at the same residential treatment facility at about the same time. It was the first long-term out-of-home placement for both of them.

Although both young men sold drugs and were in gangs, their criminal activities differed. Michael was a gang member but, unlike Jerome, he was not heavily involved with gang activity, such as fighting rivals. He also did not rob people or homes. Instead, Michael was a drug-dealer who became involved in the illicit trade at 16 when his mother, who had a long-term addiction to crack cocaine, became terminally ill. Needing to earn money, he believed he had little choice but to deal drugs:

I felt like I was basically pushed into it, and then I really didn't know another way out. I could've done something different, but ... that was the choice I made, the choice I took.

When we asked how he got started in the illegal enterprise, he said:

Um, my mom she used to deal drugs, so I got a little coke from what she used to deal and she knew a coke dealer, so that's how I got connected in.

Like her son, Michael's critically ill mom viewed drug-dealing as a way he could provide for himself when she passed away. According to Michael:

Ma introduced me to the gang. She didn't know when she might go, and this is her baby boy, so she want her baby boy to be okay.

As he got deeper into the drug game, his life spiraled out of control—"too much fast money, a lot of drama, a lot of violence." He routinely made a choice to get out of the game:

Every day I'd wake up and probably throw all my stuff out and just say, "I quit." And I'd just leave all my stuff there on the floor for a couple of hours.

However, the choice never stuck, and he continued dealing. His run came to a surprising end at age 17 when police officers stopped and searched him because he was smoking a cigarette in a phone booth. He had both drugs and money in his coat pockets. Convicted of selling narcotics, he received an EJJ sentence. He was sentenced to serve an open-ended term in a residential correctional facility and remain on probation until he turned 21.

Like Jerome, Michael felt he benefited greatly from the treatment program. He learned skills to manage his anger and received grief counseling (his mother had passed away right after he was arrested). Moreover, he made progress toward earning his GED and gained work experience at a local fast-food restaurant. After about a year in the treatment facility, Michael chose to participate in the facility's transition program (TP) rather than go home.¹² Participants in TP live together, work and go to school, pay bills, and hold each other accountable for their actions. A transition counselor advises and monitors the young people in the program. Michael says the TP helped him immensely:

They helped me establish like a job history, and how to do a resume and

how to volunteer at places and stuff like that to put on my resume.

The TP provided structure as Michael transitioned from being locked up to living independently in the community.

Upon leaving the TP at age 19, Michael returned to the Twin Cities, rented a cheap apartment, and settled into a routine. He worked two jobs (one at a fast-food restaurant and the other at a tree-trimming business), took care of his daughter several days a week, regularly checked in with his PO, and spent time with his new girlfriend (a straight-laced young woman who lived with her parents in the suburbs). In his limited time away from work, he also hung out at his cousin's apartment. Although he was drug-free, his cousins and brother (who also lived in the apartment) were not. Because of his continued abstinence, Michael was shocked when his PO told him that trace amounts of cocaine had shown up on a drug test. The only explanation Michael could render was that he had handled money that people in his cousin's apartment had rolled up and used to snort cocaine. Michael's PO did not formally sanction him; he could have asked a judge to revoke Michael's probation or forced the young man to enroll in a chemical-dependency treatment program. Rather, Michael and his PO agreed that Michael would not hang out at the apartment with his cousins and brother, and would move out of the city. The PO connected the young man with a community program that provided financial resources for housing. With that money, Michael rented a small place in a nearby suburb.

When Michael told us the story about the dirty drug test, he emphasized that his PO was understanding and very helpful locating resources to help him move. He was also grateful that his PO did not formally punish him. The relationship between Michael and his PO was far different from that of Jerome and his POs. Jerome repeatedly said that his POs did not listen to him, but Michael lauded his PO for being a good listener:

Everyone who goes through [probation] or that EJJ thing has got a story to tell. I got a story to tell. As long as you listen to the youth and not try to say "do this" or "do that" and just listen to them, you might get a few good ideas in their life. That they want to do. And that's what [names

¹² Jerome chose to go home rather than participate in the TP.

PO] do, he just sit there and listen. Now, he'll give you input on if it's the right thing or not, but he's going to leave the option up to you. He'll never force anything on you. So that's what I liked about him.

Michael appreciated that his PO did not force him to follow a particular path. Michael and his PO worked far more collaboratively than did Jerome and his POs.

Michael also felt that his PO provided concrete help, such as connecting him with the program that provided housing assistance. His PO also was a source of emotional support. In this regard, Michael said:

Yeah, I can just call him anytime I want to, it don't matter. I can call him at nighttime, anytime I want.

Michael summed up his feelings about his PO:

He help me out a lot. He don't treat me like a criminal, he treat you like you got dignity and respect. That's how it is with me and him.

As a testament to the supportive relationship, Michael continued to rely on his PO after he finished his probation term. When we asked if he considered his PO (now former PO) a friend, he replied:

Yeah, I consider him a good friend.

We met with Michael again several months after he finished probation. He was still doing well, even though he no longer had the deterrence of a prison sentence hanging over his head. The vast majority of his time was spent working; he referred to himself as a "workaholic." When not at either of his two jobs, he spent time with his daughter and girlfriend, wrote and recorded rap songs, and, every once in a while, attended a party. He still had not earned his GED, which kept him from going to college—one of the goals he had when we first met him nearly three years ago at the residential facility. When we asked if he was happy, he said:

I'd say life is like a roller coaster, so I might be up and cheerful some days and some days I might go down. It depends on the day and how I'm feeling. I am only 21, and I've got a lot of weight on my shoulders.

Although his life was by no means easy, crime no longer seemed necessary or appealing. And, for the first time, he had stability.

Discussion

Michael's relationship with his PO does not explain his success. His voluntary participation in the transition program, persistence in finding employment, willingness to find housing away from potential trouble, and his long hours doing low-wage work highlight the extent of his determination to remain crime-free, finish probation, and become self-sufficient and stable. Although not the reason for Michael's success, the relationship between him and his PO was important. The PO connected Michael with community resources—most importantly, financial assistance for housing. Moreover, the PO provided emotional support, recognized and encouraged Michael's accomplishments, and listened to the young man's concerns and plans. Rather than force Michael to follow a fixed path forward, he created a path *with* Michael that fit Michael's strengths and desires. The PO did not fixate on Michael's "risks" or "deficiencies"; rather, he helped him develop his strengths (e.g., work ethic, commitment to his daughter, and his burgeoning positive self-perception as a changed individual with an increasingly bright future). The relationship between Michael and his PO typifies a strengths-based approach to juvenile reentry.

Jerome's relationships with his POs (particularly his second PO) resembled the risks/needs-based approach to juvenile reentry. The POs focused on Jerome's risks, needs, and deficiencies. Moreover, his second PO micromanaged his transition process. According to Jerome, the POs did not recognize his progress—and not returning to gang-banging, selling drugs, and robbing people *were* major strides for Jerome (even if he still smoked marijuana now and then). His reluctance to quit smoking marijuana and finish his GED, his precarious living situations, and his off-again, on-again work situation seemingly frustrated his POs. In response, the POs relied primarily on threats and sanctions, hoping to deter Jerome from crime long enough for him to get off probation.

Jerome did in fact finish probation. However, at that point, he still did not have work, a place to live, transportation, or his GED. Months after finishing probation, he was desperate for money

and considering crime as a possible option—although he explained through tears that he desperately wanted to find a job and avoid breaking the law. When we reviewed our interviews with Jerome, we were struck that, in every discussion, he said he just wanted to learn a trade or get a manual-labor job, such as moving boxes in a warehouse. More than anything, he sought to make enough money to get an apartment with his mom and younger brother (when we last spoke, his mom was in a shelter and his brother was homeless). Rather than help him find the kind of work he wanted (or a training program that would eventually lead to that type of employment), his POs made him go to drug treatment and GED classes and apply for jobs at fast-food restaurants and similar types of establishments. Because he felt that his POs (particularly the second) did not listen to him or recognize his progress (however limited), he resented and sought to avoid them. Besides providing a deterrent to serious crime, the PO-probationer relationship did not help Jerome become stable or self-sufficient. He remains at risk of returning to crime.

We cannot know if Jerome's POs could have helped him more had they taken a strengths-based approach with him. However, we are confident that such an approach would have strengthened the relationship between Jerome and his POs, making collaboration more likely. It is undeniably easier for POs to take a strengths-based approach with highly motivated ex-offenders like Michael, but it is arguably more important that POs adopt this approach when working with more difficult cases such as Jerome.

Counties can encourage strength-based probation through training. At least one organization, the Center for Strengths-Based Strategies, provides such training throughout the United States and in other countries.¹³ Once trained, experienced POs could in turn train new POs through classroom education and on-the-job supervision and instruction. Ideally, all probation officers would receive strengths-based training before beginning their careers, as well as participate in periodic refresher courses.

We believe that probation officers, if given the opportunity, would

¹³ This organization was previously called the Center for Strengths in Juvenile Justice. The organization can be found online at www.buildmotivation.com/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1.

gladly adopt a strengths-based perspective. After all, most if not all juvenile POs go into this line of work to help young people. However, to implement a strengths-based approach, POs need both training and resources to support their efforts. Although the current economic downturn has left correctional and probation resources stretched thin, finding the necessary resources to support a strengths-based approach should be a high priority if we want ex-offenders to not only finish probation, but also gain a semblance of

stability and self-reliance so that they are no longer at risk of re-offending.

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Will Craig Named UCGIS Fellow

William J. Craig, associate director of CURA, has been named a fellow of the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science (UCGIS), a consortium of more than 70 U.S. universities that focus on research and education related to geographic information systems (GIS). Craig was honored along with six other newly named fellows in a ceremony held on February 4 in Washington, D.C., as part of the UCGIS annual winter meeting. According to the organization's website, the title of fellow is bestowed on "a geographic information scientist, engineer, or practitioner of unusual professional distinction, with outstanding and extraordinary qualifications and experience in the field of geographic information science and technology."

Craig was one of the early pioneers in GIS as project director (1973–1975) and systems director (1974–1977) of the Minnesota Land Management Information System (MLMIS) at the University of Minnesota. Along with the Canadian Geographic Information System and New York's Land Use and Natural Resources Inventory System, MLMIS was one of the world's early operational GIS. The MLMIS research and development project was fully developed and transferred to the State of Minnesota in 1977.

In addition to his work in Minnesota, Craig has been active at the national level, having served as president of three of the major GIS organizations: the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA; 1986–1987), UCGIS

(1995–1996), and the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC; 2009–2010). He was UCGIS's second president, leading the largest growth in the organization's history. Subsequently he chaired UCGIS's Policy and Legislation Committee (2000–2003), organizing meetings in

conference (1988), a multiorganizational conference that ran for a decade. He chaired the Association of American Geographers' Census Advisory Committee (2006–2007) and helped transform it into the Government Data and Employment Committee. He led NSGIC's Address Work Group (2006–2008), focusing on the release of the U.S. Census Bureau's master address file, especially its geographic coordinates. He has served on the National Research Council's Mapping Science Committee and two of its study committees, most recently producing *National Parcel Data: A Vision for the Future*.

Professionally, Craig has led many significant efforts in the GIS field. His 2002 book *Community Participation and Geographic Information Systems*, edited with Trevor Harris and Daniel Weiner, was the culmination of two decades of organizing, practicing, and writing on public-participation GIS. His 1993 *URISA Journal* article, "A GIS Code of Ethics: What Can We Learn from Other Organizations?" led to his chairing the committee that developed the GIS Certification Institute's code of ethics, which closely aligns with Craig's interpretation and organization of material taken from those other organizations. His 2005 *URISA Journal* article, "White Knights of Spatial Data Infrastructure: The Role and Motivation of Key Individuals," documents the value of individuals in achieving the National Spatial Data Infrastructure and, more importantly, makes recommendations on how to encourage such behavior in others.

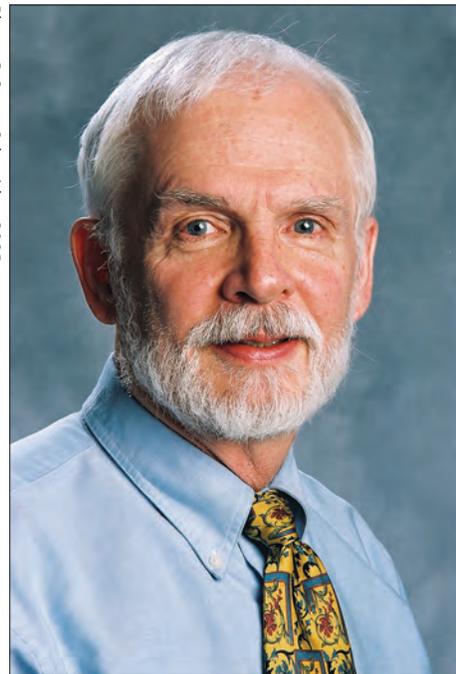


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Washington, D.C., that drew significant numbers of congressional staff members and executive-agency representatives.

As URISA's representative, Craig chaired the program committee for the first Geographic Information Systems/Land Information Systems (GIS/LIS)