

Survey On The Effectiveness Of The Comprehensive Sanctions Centers

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Introduction

For the last three years, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons (BOP), with the extensive cooperation of the Federal Probation System, has been piloting the concept of the Comprehensive Sanctions Center (CSC). The CSC is an intensive, multi-dimensional halfway house program, which incorporates several rehabilitative programs and varying levels of supervision. The CSC is designed so that each offender's incarceration and rehabilitation needs are addressed and met through a tailor-made program.

Program Overview

The CSC is a multifaceted, community-based correctional center with a range of supervision and accountability programs varied to reach a broader spectrum of offenders, including higher-risk federal offenders who previously might have been denied placement in a halfway house program. The CSC provides the court with a wider range of sentencing options and BOP institution chief executive officers with the confidence that a community plan will be tailored to the individual needs of the inmate transitioning to the community.

The CSC is used for pre-release assistance to inmates returning to the community from BOP institutions, for inmates serving their entire sentence in the community and for supervision cases in lieu of revocation. The CSC was developed in order to provide a versatile community-based program for federal offenders. Services include programs designed to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding, self-sufficient, contributing members of the community. The program is designed to meet the needs of higher-risk offenders, particularly offenders on supervision who have reverted to the use of drugs and inmates who have committed more serious crimes and are returning to the community after an extended period of incarceration.

The program does not represent a dramatic change in direction for federal community corrections. All elements of the CSC program already exist in some form in current Community Corrections Centers. The program further defines and gives greater emphasis to those elements that increase offender accountability, and the delivery of services. If successful, these initiatives will significantly shape the future of community corrections.

Program Components

To better meet the needs of higher-risk offenders in a community corrections setting, the CSC program tests a number of separate initiatives. The specifics vary from site to site, but the basic elements can be summarized as follows.

Classification System

The CSCs utilize a comprehensive classification system ranging from 24 hour restriction to home confinement. Higher risk offenders initially will be allowed very limited access to the community until the offender has shown evidence that greater responsibility can be accepted. There are five levels of restriction:

1. Level One: Offenders are denied all access to the community except in emergency situations for a limited period of time, generally not to exceed 30 days. This level is specifically designed for supervision violators, particularly substance abusers, who can benefit from a brief period of nearly complete restriction. This is followed by a highly structured period during which the offenders can be in the community for employment and gradual reintegration into the community environment.

2. Level Two: Offenders are allowed access to the community for employment and program participation.

3. Level Three: Except for employment and program participation, access to the community is restricted to four hours per week.

4. Level Four: Offenders are allowed access to the community at the discretion of the CSC.

5. Level Five: Offenders are on home confinement. In some CSCs, this is further divided into home confinement with electronic monitoring (Level Five) and without electronic monitoring (Level Six).

Program Review Team (PRT)

The Program Review Team (PRT) is made up of representatives from Federal Probation, the BOP Community Corrections Office and the halfway house provider. The PRT reviews each case entering the CSC and approves each change in level. The purpose of the PRT is to involve Federal Probation more formally in the case management of both inmates and supervision cases to improve the transition process to the community and to ensure that the needs of the court, particularly for supervision violators, are being met.

Greater Use of Volunteers and Mentors

The use of volunteers is encouraged to assist in providing training to offenders in order to provide these services in a cost efficient manner.

Drug Transitional Services

Inmates who complete a residential drug treatment program in an institution are required to participate in drug treatment in the halfway house. The CSC goes a step further and requires that any inmate with a history of drug abuse be evaluated for potential enrollment in drug treatment as part of the program plan. The inmate is enrolled in the same treatment program used by Federal Probation to ensure continuity of care after the inmate is released to supervision. Originally this was unique to the CSCs, but this has since been expanded to other federally contracted halfway houses.

Greater Emphasis on Programming

Offenders are required to participate in a fixed number of hours of drug education and life skills training including job readiness, financial management and wellness.

Field Survey

In order to evaluate the success of the CSC project in better serving the needs of the court, the Community Corrections Branch, during the summer of 1995, first surveyed the 10 chief United States probation officers who helped "pioneer" the program. A response was received from every office contacted. Indications from on-site monitorings conducted on a regular basis and contacts with CSC participants generally have been positive. However, it was felt that direct contact with Federal Probation would be a useful way of determining the impact of the program on local jurisdictions.

Federal Probation officers were asked to comment on the classification system, the program review team, the use of volunteers and drug transitional services. They were not asked to comment on enhanced programming as generally Probation is uninvolved in this aspect of the project. Enhanced programming was addressed in a separate study discussed later in this report.

In order to further evaluate this endeavor, the BOP, during the spring of 1996, contacted 16 CSC directors and asked their views on the success of the project. They were asked to comment on the Program Review Team; the classification system; enhanced programming; and the use of volunteers. CSC directors were not asked to comment on drug treatment, as this is typically provided by a separate provider off-site.

At the time of this report, there are 20 CSCs in operation and additional sites are scheduled to become operational in the next year. The most recent CSCs are not represented in this study.

Overall, there is strong support for the CSC concept. Representative comments are as follows.

Classification System

There is generally strong support for the revised classification system, particularly the availability of "Level One," which allows the option of complete restriction to the center for a limited period of time. Representative comments noted the following:

Federal Probation:

"It is frequently used in cases reverting to drug abuse. This sanction allows for an immediate sanction; a 'cleansing' period; more intensive and immediate counseling; and the ability to structure behavior quickly without the journey back to a prison."

"Since a large percentage of our violators has to do with substance abusers and failure to participate in substance abuse treatment facilities, the CSC has definitely been a great alternative to revocation for technical violators. Yes, our court supports the use of CSC in lieu of revocation. The reason the court supports the CSC is because it provides them (court) with another option, which, in the case of technical violations, that other option is of great importance."

"Substance abusers, in relapse, often manifest many problems. It is common for there to be a loss of employment, loss of residence and broken personal relationships. Level One, complete restriction to the CSC, facilitates the diagnostic and treatment processes."

There are concerns, however, about restricting all access to the community in Level One, including employment and the availability of treatment outside the facility.

CSC Directors:

"In my opinion, Level One is a wonderful alternative that provides the courts with an option to use in lieu of incarceration in an institution. The majority of the offenders are grateful for the opportunity to be in a CSC vs. incarceration in an institution. The sanction of complete restriction during Level One sometimes imposes a burden on my staff, especially those difficult cases that

believe they did not have a fair trial. But overall, the offenders adjust to the total restrictions and they try their best to abide by the rules and regulations of the program.”

"The 'Level One' provision for complete restriction appears to be a viable alternative to revocation for technical violators, particularly substance abusers."

Program Review Team

Involvement of Probation in the PRT has received strong support. Typical comments are as follows.

Federal Probation:

“The Probation Office's participation has definitely increased the communication between our agency, the Bureau of Prisons, and the halfway house by working together on a daily basis. Prior to implementing this program, a good line of communication already existed between the Bureau of Prisons and halfway house staff. However, it is now on a more formalized and structured basis which continues to run effectively for all agencies involved.”

“Over the past several months, the Program Review Team seems to have provided many worthwhile opportunities between U.S. probation officers and the resident advisers at the CSC. Communication and visitation involvement has improved between U.S. probation officers and staff at the CSC. Probation officers meet directly with resident advisers to review treatment plans for offenders while at the CSC, thereby providing for a smoother transition of offenders into the community.”

The only comment that indicated that the PRT was not an improvement was from a chief U.S. probation officer who stated that the “creation of the PRT did not introduce anything new.” The chief, however, supports the full involvement of Probation “as soon as the offender reaches the halfway house.”

CSC Directors:

Involvement of Probation in the PRT has been found to improve significantly the transition of the offender to the community.

“The PRT has given the Probation staff an opportunity to gather information on new resident arrivals and assign the new cases quickly. This enhanced communication between our agencies has also helped manage the more difficult cases and helped coordinate their program plans.”

“The U.S. probation officers' involvement with cases has greatly assisted in the transition process by allowing the offender access to an officer prior to release. This introduction allows for questions about supervision and release planning to be discussed openly by all parties. Involvement by the Bureau of Prisons and Probation in the PRT is essential for the continuity of supervision.”

Greater Use of Volunteers and Mentors

The view of Probation towards the use of volunteers in general and mentors in particular appears to be mixed. There is general support for the use of volunteers, but there are training and resource issues, as indicated by the following comments.

Federal Probation:

“The use of trained volunteers can be very labor intensive from the probation office's standpoint, particularly in education and training. The probation office does not have sufficient staffing to even address the starting and the maintaining of a volunteer or mentoring type program.”

“Yes, I support the use of volunteers, if they are carefully screened and selected. My staff has volunteered time to the local halfway house, including participation in the life skills and drug education programs, lecturing at staff training seminars, attending evening resident meetings, and serving on the VOA board.”

CSC Directors:

“In theory, I support the use of volunteers but I have not found it to be practical. Mentors are very difficult to locate, and I am not sure what the research states about their effectiveness.”

“Volunteers have facilitated education on issues such as HIV, Domestic Violence and Reproductive Health Care and offered assistance with issues of education and housing. Because of the support of volunteers, we are able to offer weekly in-house classes.”

Drug Transitional Services

Respondents see a benefit in starting drug treatment as soon as possible and using the same treatment provider used by Federal Probation for offenders on parole and supervised release. Typical comments are as follows:

Federal Probation:

“I believe that the BOP Transitional Services Program is a good one. I believe that the TSP facilitated the transition of the offender to drug aftercare after leaving the CSC because it permitted a continuity of services that previously did not exist.”

“This is perhaps the most successful aspect of the CSC. Inmates who will be required to participate in substance abuse treatment as part of supervision can begin a program as soon as they reach the community. Since the BOP ‘piggybacks’ with our contract providers, a smooth transition can occur from pre-release to supervision with no disruption of services.

Enhanced Programming

In general, there was support for increased programming in the CSC.

CSC Directors:

“We support mandatory participation in life/family skills training. For years we have been conducting mandatory groups that we call ‘Personal and Social Adjustment.’ Such programs are the essence of what separates us from jails.”

“It is my opinion, as I have seen changes in communication skills, improvement in anger management and independent thinking skills develop, that these programs can only improve the offender's chance of success in the community. Most of the life skills are provided by staff. However, we have found many interesting groups in the community willing to share their expertise with the offenders. We have secured speakers, ideas, workbooks and outside material in an effort to enhance the programs.”

Case Study

Research Design

In addition to the field survey, a plan to evaluate program effectiveness was developed. This consisted of a study of a three-month cohort of offenders entering the program in eight locations who were followed until they completed or were removed from the CSC. The data was collected from these eight sites between March 1, 1994, and June 1, 1995.

The sample totaled 377 offenders, including supervision violators, newly sentenced offenders (direct court commitments) and inmates released from BOP institutions through pre-release procedures. Data was collected from computer records as well as telephone interviews with CSC case workers. The information included the number of hours of drug education and counseling, life skills, formal education and participation in a mentoring program.

Demographic Variables

Information was collected on several variables including the offender's gender, race, age and offense type.

The CSC sample was comprised of 347 (92 percent) males and 30 (8 percent) females. In addition, 58 percent of the offenders were white, 41 percent were African American and one percent was categorized as other. Compared to the general halfway house population, the CSC sample was more likely to be male and African American.

The offenders' age at the time of entry into the CSC ranged from 20 to 66. The average age was 39, and two-thirds were between the ages of 30 and 50.

By type of offense, drug related offenses accounted for 38 percent, while 32 percent of the offenders' committed fraud/extortion offenses. The next most common offense was for property-related offenses (8 percent), followed by robbery (7 percent) and firearms offenses (7 percent).

The CSC sample was similar to the general halfway house population in terms of age and offense of conviction.

Program Variables

One of the major components of the CSC was enhanced programming that addressed the needs of the offender. The CSC programs were divided into several program areas that included life skills and drug education. Drug education was intended to be a general overview that did not require teaching by treatment specialists. Components of the life skills programs include parenting, wellness, stress management, money management and self-esteem training. All offenders were required to complete a minimum number of hours for each program area.

The requirements varied from site to site depending on the resources available to each halfway house. In general, CSCs were required to provide 20 hours of drug education and 35 hours of life skills for each resident in the CSC for 30 days or longer. Unfortunately, this proved to be overly ambitious in most cases. As reflected in the results of the review, relatively few residents were able to complete the full 20 hours of drug education and 35 hours of life skills. Participants averaged a little more than 8 hours of drug education and a little more than 17 hours of life skills. However, there was a great deal of variability from site to site in the hours of programming provided.

Based partially on the results of this study and other input from the CSCs, the requirements were changed for newly implemented CSCs to 8 hours of drug education and 12 hours of life skills. Given the demands placed on offenders to work and, in some cases, participate in intensive drug treatment, the new requirements are more reasonable and should be well within the reach of all CSC sites.

Several questions also were asked regarding volunteers and mentors. According to the survey, 25 percent of the CSC participants had volunteers provide services for courses that included drug education, spirituality and financial management. Virtually no CSC participants benefited from support from a mentor. As previously indicated in the field survey, the mentors and volunteers can

cause the CSC and probation staff extra work in areas of training. Many of the CSCs and probation offices have limited resources and cannot afford to provide training to support these programs.

Conclusion

The survey was an attempt to evaluate the success of the Bureau of Prisons in meeting the needs of the federal courts, Federal Probation and the Bureau of Prisons, at least as far as the CSC project is concerned. There appears to be strong support for the involvement of Federal Probation with offenders in the CSC through the PRT. This has helped to better inform the courts about the nature of the halfway house program and has eased the transition of the offender into supervision after release from the CSC.

The availability of close supervision in CSCs Level One offers a viable alternative to the courts for sanctioning technical violations of supervision, but some concern was expressed about the lack of treatment available to offenders while restricted to the CSC. The view on the advisability of using mentors and other volunteers is decidedly mixed, but is seen by some as a viable option if there is a large investment of time for training.

Drug transitional services in the CSC improves drug treatment after release by introducing treatment as soon as the inmate arrives in the community.

Finally, the requirements for life skills and drug education proved to be overly ambitious and it was found necessary to reduce the requirements. It is hoped that the reduced hours will nonetheless prove beneficial.

While the survey suggests areas that need further review, in general, it appears that the CSC project is meeting its program goals and, where feasible, should be expanded to other locations.