The Community Intensive Supervision Project
by Megan Kurlychek

The previous issue of Pennsylvania Progress highlighted Pennsylvania's initiative to incorporate the Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) philosophy on a system-wide basis. While this specific philosophical approach to juvenile justice is new to the Commonwealth, the importance of many of its components has already been recognized by juvenile justice professionals and can be witnessed in existing successful programs. One such program that deserves recognition is the Community Intensive Supervision Project (CISP) operated by the Juvenile Section of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County, Family Division.

As more fully described on the following pages, this program is a true community-based initiative targeting juveniles from selected neighborhoods for intensive supervision in their own communities. By nurturing community support and incorporating program components such as community safety and youth accountability, CISP provides a brilliant example of an existing program model that fits easily within the new BARJ philosophy. Indeed this program was selected by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as one of three Balanced and Restorative Justice model demonstration sites in the United States.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

The CISP program began operation in June of 1990 to provide an alternative to institutionalization for juvenile offenders who continue to commit delinquent acts while under Court supervision. The program design provides maximum levels of supervision while allowing youths to remain in their home environment. This design not only saves the juvenile system money by reducing institutional placements, but also allows the participating juveniles to learn and develop skills in a real world setting.

The idea of providing alternatives to placement within a youth’s home community was readily embraced by the juvenile court, the county commissioners and various state and private agencies that funded program start-up. In the first two years of CISP operation, funds were received from the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, the Commonwealth’s Human Services Development Fund, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and the Office of Drug and Alcohol Programs.

In addition to gaining the necessary funding, an important component of any community-based program is gaining the trust and support of the host community. CISP staff addressed this concern in a variety of fashions from community meetings to the careful selection and supervision of participants to ensure community safety.

One essential element of community involvement was the active solicitation of indigenous staff members who could provide strong ties to the community and serve as positive role models for the youths. Program start-up required the hiring of 40 new staff in administrative and direct service positions with the direct service positions filled, as often as possible, by persons from the community in which the CISP center was located.
The original program targeted three Pittsburgh communities that contributed significantly to the juvenile court’s placement costs. These communities, Garfield, the Hill District and Homewood, are primarily African-American with high rates of unemployment. To be eligible for program participation, a youth must be from one of the targeted communities, be a male between the ages of 10 and 18, be faced with the possibility of institutionalization, and generally be a repeat offender with exceptions made for first-time drug offenses involving the sale and use of crack/cocaine. Sex offenders are not eligible for program participation under any circumstance.

The program provides 24-hour–a-day, 7-day–a-week accountability through electronic monitoring, mandatory school attendance, mandatory CISP activities during the evening hours and weekends, and staff-provided transportation home from all CISP activities.

Although high levels of supervision are a fundamental component of CISP, it is important to remember that the ultimate goal is to instill in these young men the decision-making skills they will need to remain productive and responsible community members after supervision has expired. This goal is achieved through a comprehensive assessment of each youth upon entry and the provision of a broad array of services. The following section provides a more detailed description of the offered services.

THE SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

CISP has incorporated a three-level program of behavior modification that allows participants to gradually learn to make responsible decisions on their own. Level One is the introductory phase in which the youth learns the rules of the program and is evaluated by program staff. Level Two involves encouraging positive behavior and sanctioning inappropriate behavior as the youth learns to make responsible choices with the help of program staff. In Level Three the youth begins to make responsible decisions with minimal supervision and is prepared for aftercare. Through a staff developed curriculum that focuses on increasing self-awareness and critical thinking and decision-making skills, the program aims to move the young males through a positive transition to manhood.

Throughout all three levels of programming, services are individualized to fit the juvenile’s needs. The individualized treatment program may include some or all of the core services listed below.

Counseling

The program offers both group and family counseling with a focus on the reality therapy model. Topics covered include health issues such as self-esteem and sexual responsibility, the impact of crime victimization and gang participation, and life skills such as career awareness, peer pressure, racial issues and parenting. Parental involvement in the counseling sessions is strongly encouraged with special sessions scheduled just for parents to discuss issues such as identifying drug or alcohol problems and holding children responsible for their actions.

Drug and Alcohol Counseling

A primary focus of the program is drug and alcohol counseling as many of the program participants either exhibit problem behaviors in this area or have been negatively affected by drug dealing and use in the community. In April 1992, the program hired a full-time drug and alcohol coordinator and a substance abuse counselor for each site and developed a four-phase drug and alcohol curriculum that includes: (1) the assessment of each youth within three weeks of CISP placement, (2) the design of either a prevention or treatment program dependent upon the assessment, (3) participation in issue oriented groups and a drug and alcohol education program, and (4) an aftercare plan.

Community Service

The community service component holds the juveniles accountable for their actions by giving back to the community they have harmed. In addition, this component is beneficial for the community as it adds to local resources and helps the juveniles to develop positive associations within the community and even to develop life and job skills that may be useful in the future. Examples of community service projects include tutoring children at a local Reading Center, removing graffiti from neighborhood walls, registering voters in a “Get Out to Vote” project, and maintaining yards and painting homes for low income, elderly or disabled community members.

School/Work

Program participants enrolled in school are required to maintain daily attendance and the first activity clients participate in upon arrival at the CISP center is homework completion. This time is used as study time.
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for those juveniles preparing for their G.E.D. exam. Employment readiness is also an integral part of the education component. Moreover, juveniles who maintain employment while in the program dedicate a portion of their earnings to the payment of restitution, when applicable, which enforces the youth's sense of social responsibility.

Recreational and Cultural Activities

The recreational and cultural component allows participants the opportunity to develop appropriate social skills and helps them to access the resources of their community such as swimming pools, museums, YMCA’s and cultural events.

Performance Monitoring and Sanctioning

Throughout involvement in CISP, participants receive constant feedback on their performance with daily assessments of progress towards program goals. Also vital to the program’s overall success is a sanctioning system that allows the participants to be held accountable for inappropriate behavior. Sanctioning options utilized include short-term placements in the Shuman Detention Center and the Allegheny Academy Sanction Unit and placement in a 90-day Boot Camp Program run through VisionQuest. The final sanction is a petition for a hearing at which the youth is removed from the program for “Failure to Adjust” and an alternative disposition is ordered by the Court.

Goals and Objectives of the Community Intensive Supervision Project

1) To operate an intensive supervision program in an urban area for repeat juvenile offenders that attempts to balance community protection, competency development and accountability between the offender, community and victim.

2) To successfully impact the recidivism of youth in CISP, thereby reducing the number of youth requiring institutionalization.

3) To provide a real world learning experience in the community, rather than an artificial or sterile environment of an institution.

4) To maintain “Failure to Adjust” discharges from the project at no more than five percent.

5) To make CISP effective enough to significantly impact the court’s overall institution budget.

6) To emphasize drug and alcohol treatment, education and testing.

A change away from the “career criminal” was initiated with CISP taking more clients who were first-time drug offenders and who had less serious backgrounds. The program still was able to serve as an alternative to placement based on the sentencing guidelines for crack/cocaine offenses. More recent discharge data show that CISP is achieving considerable levels of success with this population with 75% (or 91 of 121) of youths discharged in 1996 successfully completing the program.

Another important change noted in the evaluation was a reduction in the number of clients served per site. The original goal of 40 youths per site was deemed too high by staff members who felt they could not effectively provide the intensive level of services to this number of clients. A revised goal of 22 to 25 clients on “active” status with another 7 to 10 clients on “aftercare” or “other” status was determined more appropriate. The most direct impact of the reduction in population served was an increase in the per diem cost from the originally estimated $45 per day to $55 per day in 1993. This still provided overall cost savings to the county when compared to residential placement costs that ranged from $80 to $160 per day in the same time period.

Program Evaluation and Evolution

Evaluation

The Pittsburgh Foundation provided a grant to the National Center for Juvenile Justice to conduct a performance evaluation of the CISP program during the first two years of operation. The evaluation carefully documented program start-up and the types of juveniles committed to the program and their success rates.

In the first year of operation, the court committed juveniles to the program who had been previously adjudicated delinquent (89%) and who had been in some type of placement (43%). However, the program was not achieving the desired levels of success with this clientele with the evaluation finding only 53% of all youths committed to CISP to have successfully completed the program.
In addition to the external evaluation, in September 1993, CISP formed an internal Program Development Committee to ensure continued program growth and improvement. The Committee has, among others, created a standard assessment and treatment format to be used for all participants, reviewed and updated treatment offerings to ensure they meet the needs of the clientele, and developed a formal aftercare component to the program.

CISP has also dedicated resources to improving the knowledge and professionalism of program staff. CISP staff members benefit from a variety of training seminars that cover topics such as youth violence prevention, victim sensitivity and awareness, and the impact of HIV/AIDS. Training sessions also cover topics that help staff improve their professionalism and service delivery skills with offerings such as “Fundamental Skills for Probation Officers,” “Ethics for Addiction Counselors,” and “How to Make Presentations with Confidence and Power.”

Over the years, CISP has been able to expand its offerings both to serve more youths and to provide new services. In April 1994, CISP opened a fourth site to serve the community of Wilkinsburg, a suburb of Pittsburgh. In 1995, CISP began participation in the Conflict Resolution and Mediation Project, supported by a grant from Housing and Urban Development. The project, designed to help alleviate gang-related violence in the two neighboring communities of the Hill District and East Liberty, is a collaborative effort between CISP, Duquesne University's Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy and the Pittsburgh Mediation Center (PMC). Also in 1997, CISP began functioning as an aftercare program for eligible juveniles released from residential placements.

An important first step for CISP in incorporating the BARJ philosophy was a self-assessment to determine exactly where the program stood in relation to the BARJ goals. The self-assessment revealed that the program was weakest in the area of victim awareness and sensitivity. With the help of federal trainers and funding, the program hired a part-time BARJ coordinator whose responsibilities included the development of a victim awareness curriculum to be completed by all CISP participants.

In addition, participation in the federal BARJ initiative led program administrators to strengthen existing program elements. For example, community service programs shifted away from a labor-intensive model towards a service delivery model in which the community is asked to determine what services are needed. Also, the competency development component began to focus on building upon juveniles' strengths instead of just focusing on weaknesses. The CISP Coordinator refers to the new philosophy as “cultivating strengths instead of failures.”

CISP has many effective components that contribute to the overall levels of program success. From careful planning and start-up to continued involvement in evaluation and self-improvement projects, the CISP model exhibits many qualities other programs may wish to replicate in the development of community-based alternatives for juvenile offenders.

The involvement of the community through the hiring of indigenous staff has been noted as one of the most insightful measures taken by the program administrators. This not only helped the communities to become more involved in, and accepting of, the program but has provided notable advantages to the participants.

The willingness to evaluate outcomes and change program elements based on evaluation findings is also an important element. For example, the program was willing to reduce the number of clients served per site when staff realized they were not effectively meeting program treatment goals while serving larger numbers of juveniles.

The Program Development Committee and staff training seminars are examples of internal dedication to improvement. The work of the Committee has helped to assure that CISP clients receive effective treatment services throughout their interaction with the program.
program while the staff training program ensures the services are delivered by professional, culturally-sensitive staff.

The success of the program has been recognized far outside of the local communities it serves with the CISP program receiving the following prestigious awards:

**Court Operated Program of the Year.** Juvenile Court Judge’s Commission, 1991.

**Exemplary State and Local Awards Program from the National Center for Public Productivity.** Rutgers University, 1991.


**Innovation in State and Local Government Award.** Sponsored by the Ford Foundation and John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, 1994.

**DIRECTIONS**

Fundamental to the success CISP has achieved is the commitment of program staff and administrators to continuously improve and enhance services. The program also hopes to serve as a resource for Allegheny County in developing a system-wide BARJ initiative and remains open to future change that will enhance adherence to the BARJ principles. For example, although the program invested time and resources in the development of a victim awareness curriculum specifically for CISP, the program is not currently using this curriculum as it has been asked to participate in a greater effort by the Allegheny County Juvenile Court to develop a general victim awareness curriculum for use on a county-wide basis.

Other directions the program hopes to take in the near future include the hiring of a full-time BARJ coordinator who has significant experience in the victim/witness arena and the continued expansion of the staff training component to ensure that all CISP staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to best serve CISP participants and their home communities.

If you would like more information on CISP or would like to arrange a site visit, please contact:

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**A Case Study**

Like most juveniles committed to the CISP program, “Johnny” had a long history of delinquent behavior that could be traced back to elementary school. In the third grade he began having serious trouble in school and was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hypertension Disorder (ADHD). He first became involved in the juvenile justice system on a charge of petty theft and his delinquent behavior quickly escalated from stealing small items “just for the fun of it” to the $28,000 burglary of a sporting goods store. After this latter episode, his mother relinquished custody of her son so that he could be placed in the Glen Mills School for Boys hoping that this would turn his life around.

After release from Glen Mills, his family moved to Pittsburgh and within six months, Johnny was in trouble again for skipping school and stealing. In July 1996, he was adjudicated delinquent on the charge of burglary, ordered to pay $100 restitution and to participate in the CISP program.

Adjusting to the strict structure of the CISP program was not easy, as Johnny was not used to being held accountable for his actions. But, after a while, he advanced to the second program level and staff could see him making positive choices and replacing inappropriate behaviors with appropriate behaviors. CISP staff helped him to see how his actions and choices affected himself and others and how his crime impacted his victim and the community.

In January 1997, Johnny successfully completed the third and final level of the CISP program and fulfilled his financial obligation to his victim. In April he received an interscholastic athletic award for football and wrestling and, in June, he graduated from high school. Johnny dreams of becoming a professional football player, but realizes the importance of an education and plans to seek a bachelor’s and master’s degree in Early Childhood Education so that he can eventually open a daycare center to serve his community.

Johnny is off to an excellent start in his educational endeavors as he has received a full full scholarship to Duquesne University. Moreover, Johnny is off to a new and excellent start on his future with the decision-making skills to succeed in school, on the football field, and in life.
ATTENTION: RECIPIENT

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