

The Role of Religious Services in The Oregon Accountability Model

By Dennis R. Holmes

There is a growing realization in the medical, psychological and criminal justice fields that we are more likely to achieve lasting results by providing a combination of programs or treatments rather than by depending on one cutting-edge theory or treatment alone. This is known as giving the patient or client a cocktail. In medicine, for example, cancer patients are given a large number of cancer-fighting medications rather than one or two semi-proven treatments.

The Oregon Department of Corrections is trying to rehabilitate offenders. We hope to change the way criminals think, because we believe that behavior is simply an outward expression of inward thought. In our current approach, we offer a large variety of cognitive restructuring and hands-on vocational training programs in our effort to provide a cocktail of treatment opportunities.

One reality we have to face is that incarceration itself often works against both personal change and the development of personal responsibility. The Oregon Accountability Model is based on the philosophy of responsibility and of personal change within that context (see sidebar).

The DOC's rehabilitative programs are specifically designed to engage and help resolve criminogenic needs within the inmate population, and religious services must be no exception. Those of us who work in correctional religious services believe that nothing should happen in religious programming that does not address criminogenic/relational issues. It is not only the dissemination of religious information we are concerned with, it is also the inclusion of the Oregon Accountability Model in all programming.

Cross-Cultural Mission

Missionaries of various faiths who travel from the West to an economically developing nation realize that to effectively reach those indigenous to that country, they cannot simply reproduce Western-style ministry. They must learn the language and adapt their ministry to the culture they hope to reach. In this sense, prison ministry is similar to a cross-cultural mission endeavor. Those who are most effective in prison ministry understand and adjust to this fact. The essential message does not change, but the approach and means used to bring that message to this unique audience requires thoughtful adaptation and implementation.

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In religious services we realize that if all we do is educate criminals in the tenets of various faith traditions the result will simply be religiously educated criminals. Along with other cognitive programs within the DOC,

religious services, activities and classes address the specific criminogenic needs of the inmate population, rather than simply reproducing an outside religious function or experience inside the prison chapel. Because we are working with individuals who possess moderate to severe criminal thinking patterns, religious volunteers must also design curriculums that address those specific needs. Inmates need a cocktail. As with medical treatment models, inmates benefit when their needs are addressed in a multifaceted approach.

The Oregon DOC has done an outstanding job identifying the cognitive needs of inmates. As volunteer religious groups learn to adapt their teachings to this cross-cultural demographic they will not only find greater success in the mission of life-change, they will also become more integrated into the whole of the DOC vision. They will not be merely an outside program bringing religious education to inmates, they will be one of the DOC's strongest cognitive programs acting in harmony with other programs to provide the cocktail of treatment needed to prepare incarcerated men and women to live productive, crime-free lives.

Because of the institutional context of religious instruction, volunteers must personally model a strong respect for security. Security represents law and order. Inmates will be faced with balancing religious freedom (actually all personal freedom) with laws when they return to the outside world. If they are taught by precept as well as by example how this balance is achieved by noncriminals, inmates will have a better chance of survival and success than they did prior to incarceration.

The most vital input religious services can have is in the area of "relationship." In the last few years research has shown the relationship between

client and service provider to be the largest factor in change next to the client's personal motivation to make that change. Therefore, the DNA of all programming, of all intervention, must be relationship and the personalized encouragement to change that trust can inspire. Relationship is especially important in religious services. As one chaplain put it,

Religious services is more than a "treatment approach." It can provide a context for meaning, hope, a sense of purpose, relationship with spiritual communities, experiences of love, forgiveness and acceptance. All of these are instrumental in recovery and the integration into society. Perhaps it is the mystery of religion, of spiritual intervention ... that (may be) measured more in quality than quantity.

— Chaplain Emily Brault 2008

If this reality is implemented into the core values of religious services, it is my conviction that we will see a decrease in criminal motivation and therefore less criminal action. Recidivism will drop, which is ultimately what this is all about.

Many religious volunteer groups within the Oregon correctional system have found creative ways to incorporate their belief systems into the goals of the Oregon Accountability Model. When they meet with inmates, they address specific criminogenic issues. This helps to provide clear direction and guidance for the inmate, giving him or her ways to apply the teachings of each group to the unique problems the inmate faces. All of this is done in the context of authentic relationship. This, I believe, is crucial if the greatest possible opportunity for change is going to be offered to the offender. In this sense, religious services takes its place alongside other DOC cognitive programs in providing a valuable cocktail of treatment to those housed within Oregon's prison system.

Dennis R. Holmes, MA, is assistant administrator of religious services for the Oregon Department of Corrections.

The Oregon Accountability Model

The Oregon Accountability Model encompasses the simultaneous, coordinated and efficient implementation of many DOC initiatives and projects that provide a foundation for inmates to lead successful lives upon release.

The Oregon Accountability Model has six components, each of which stands on its own as a project or a part of the corrections organization and culture. However, woven together these six separate components form a stronger fiber that strengthens the department's ability to hold offenders accountable for their actions and DOC staff accountable for achieving the mission and vision of the department.

Components of the Oregon Accountability Model

Criminal risk factor assessment and case planning. With the opening of the new intake center at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, the department implemented an enhanced assessment process. The outcome is a corrections plan for every inmate that is tracked throughout an inmate's incarceration and supervision in the community. The corrections plan is based on mitigating seven criminal risk factors that research indicates predict future criminal behavior. The seven criminal risk factors are:

- Associates
- Substance abuse
- Community functioning
- Education and employment
- Emotional and mental health
- Marital and family life
- Attitudes

The department provides targeted programs and services to mitigate these risk factors during incarceration and community supervision. When offenders transition successfully back into their communities they are less likely to commit new crimes.

Staff-inmate interactions. Correctional security practices such as classification, gang management and housing assignments hold inmates accountable for their actions every day. They ensure that the prisons are safe, civil and productive. A key part of this component recognizes that staff interactions with inmates help shape positive behavior. The department encourages staff to influence inmates' behavior, acknowledge positive change and provide incentives to inmates to change their behavior.

Work and programs. To prepare an inmate for living in the community upon release, the DOC uses the assessments performed at intake to create a corrections plan for each inmate. The plan specifies the

correctional programs the inmate should complete before release to best mitigate his identified risks. Meaningful work is known to contribute to the success of offenders upon release. Many correctional programs prepare inmates for work (education, treatment) and others teach inmates the skills they need to gain employment and succeed in the workplace. Most Oregon state inmates have a job while incarcerated to give them on-the-job experience.

Children and families. The department encourages productive relationships between families and inmates to strengthen ties and increase the likelihood of success upon release. The period of a parent's incarceration provides an excellent opportunity for positive intervention with families at risk. The department has a strong interest in the children of incarcerated parents because they are five to six times more likely to be incarcerated than their peers. The department leads a statewide partnership called The Children of Incarcerated Parents Project that provides inmates with tools for successful parenting and allows opportunities for inmates to practice those pro-social behaviors. Three strategies initially identified are: parent education classes for inmates, a therapeutic child-centered facility serving children of female inmates, and examination of current rules and practices including visiting, mail and phones.

Reentry. The department is involved in a statewide project that focuses on transition — a seamless movement of offenders from the community to incarceration to community supervision. The project would limit duplication of services and increase effective and efficient use of partnerships. Seven of the department's prisons have been identified as reentry facilities. These prisons are strategically located to encourage reach-in by the community. Connections with the community before release are important factors in offenders' successes on the outside and may include work, treatment, religion and housing. Reentry prisons will be geared to preparing inmates for release during their last six months of incarceration.

Community supervision and programs. There are more than 30,000 offenders on probation or post-prison supervision in Oregon communities. The department continually works in partnership with each county to develop, deliver and administer best practices regarding supervision, sanctions and programs for offenders and their families. It aims to reduce the odds that these offenders will commit new crimes. The ultimate goal of the Oregon Accountability Model is to improve public safety. The model ties together many concurrent and interrelated efforts with the department's partners into a cohesive strategy to reduce recidivism and help inmates become productive citizens.