For the past several years, almost 600,000 offenders per year have returned to the community from prison (Peterson, 2000). While prison growth has recently slowed, prison and parole populations continue to grow (Glazer and Palla, 2004). When reviewing the number of offenders incarcerated or under some other form of correctional control, it is alarmingly clear that the return of inmates to the community is not likely to abate in the near (or distant) future.

While offenders, in some instances, are offered some programming while incarcerated, a good percentage of offenders are returned to the community ill-equipped for re-integration (Peterson, 2000). For example, of nonviolent offenders returning to the community from prison, 40 percent have less than a high school education, nearly 66 percent indicated they had been using drugs during the month prior to their offense, 25 percent were dependent on alcohol prior to entering prison (DuBose and Munro, 2004) and unemployment is fairly high among this population (Peterson, 2000). The social costs of inmates returning to the nation’s communities are evident, and these social costs are above and beyond those associated with continued criminal behavior. Given these numbers and the community concerns associated with offender reentry, it is no wonder why federal, state and local governments have recently been so attentive to this process. One way to facilitate successful offender reintegration is through reentry programming.

Reentry programs are promising for a number of reasons. First, they provide an opportunity to shape offender behavior while transitioning back to their natural environments, thereby reducing recidivism rates. They also allow the ability to proactively deal with violations of post-release supervision and reduce prison populations — as violators are making up greater percentages of the prison population than in the past (Cohen, 1993, Travis, 2000). Additionally, such programs can facilitate a successful reentry that, in addition to reducing recidivism, can lead to better and more functional lives for former inmates, their families and communities.

All of this optimism and potential must, however, be tempered with corrections’ penchant to do the wrong thing (Gendreau, Goggin and Smith, 1999; Latessa, Cullen and Gendreau, 2003). In spite of sound empirical evidence to the contrary, correctional agencies continue to spend good money on the latest and greatest programming and assessment techniques (and the not-so-latest or greatest correctional interventions) in hopes that these novel attempts at correctional interventions will solve all of corrections’ problems (panaceaphilia revisited).

The purpose of this article is not to rehash failed and botched attempts at implementing correctional programming. Rather, it brings to bear the research on some residential programs that served offenders during reentry, and should shape, to some degree, the development of reentry programs. The question “How should we design a good reentry program?” has already been answered. The components of an effective correctional intervention, including offender reentry programs, have already been enumerated a number of times (Gendreau and Andrews, 1996; Gendreau, 1996; Gendreau and Goggin, 1996; Andrews and Bonta, 1998; Gendreau and Goggin, 2000; Gendreau, French and Taylor, 2002). And while it is recognized that there may be special issues specific to reentry programs, the core of these programs should follow the basic tenets of effective correctional interventions.

The research discussed in this article, covering 28 residential programs that served parolees and offenders on post-release control in Ohio, can serve as a blueprint in the development or redesign of reentry programs. While the
empirical research is limited to programs in Ohio. The results reported here are consistent with research findings, from studies conducted during different time periods, in different jurisdictions, in different countries, with male and female offenders, and with adult and juvenile offenders. The amount of evidence on what constitutes an effective correctional intervention is massive. This body of literature is so large and consistent that if operating or designing a reentry program, heed this warning: if the program does not embody a number of the characteristics discussed below, whether residential or not, the likelihood that the program will succeed in reducing recidivism is low. While reading through this article and the research findings, assess how well the program performs in these areas.

Prior to discussing the characteristics of effective correctional programs, and thereby the characteristics of effective reentry programs (and these characteristics should start to look familiar), the concept of evidence-based practice (EBP) will be discussed. There has been a sweeping movement across every jurisdictional level and many disciplines to shift to an EBP model. Rigorously, EBP is a decision-making process that requires a practitioner to make decisions based on empirical evidence (Sackett et al., 1996). For correctional practitioners, that requires assessment and profiling followed by a review of the research to determine the most effective course of action. EBP does not seek creativity in developing programs or a reliance upon clinical experience or professional opinion when a large body of empirical literature exists to provide directions. As a matter of fact, by definition, EBP requires a correctional practitioner to look at what has been done before: determined, based on available evidence, what is effective, and then follow that course of action.

Core Principles of Effective Correctional Interventions

The past 30 years has proved to be very important regarding research on correctional interventions. A substantial number of reviews of the research are available (Gendreau and Ross, 1987; Andrews et al., 1990; Gendreau and Andrews, 1990; Lipsey, 1992; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; Andrews and Dowden, 1999; Dowden and Andrews, 1999a, 1999b, and 2000). And while this research is not being reviewed in detail here, what this research has concluded regarding correctional interventions will be highlighted.

First, correctional programs should focus on their resources on high-risk offenders. The evidence on this is consistent and strong (for a review of this literature, see Andrews, Gonta, and Royce, 1999; Loveland and Longenecker, 2004 and in press). Second, correctional programs must target specific criminogenic needs (for a listing of those needs and their relative impact on recidivism when targeted, see Andrews and Dowden, 1999). Next, correctional programs must provide behavioral, cognitive-behavioral or social-learning-based interventions (Andrews et al., 1990). In addition, correctional agencies must address implementation issues, including staff training, evaluation and support. Finally, correctional programs must have program integrity, which includes the aforementioned principles but also includes quality assurance, evaluation efforts and overall attention to the intervention’s fidelity to the principles of effective inter-

ventions. Fortunately, several instruments and processes exist for measuring program integrity, including the Corrective Program Assessment Inventory (Gendreau and Andrews, 1994), the Corrective Practice Treatment Survey (Tobin, 2006) and the Correctional Association (2004) and other methods (Lipsey, 1999). All of these processes measure, to some degree, a program’s adherence to the aforementioned principles and focus on ensuring that a correctional program has both the context and capacity to deliver a sound correctional intervention.

Figure 1: Effectiveness of Halfway House Participation by Offender Risk Level

The study used in this article to illustrate the importance of these characteristics to reentry programs was conducted in 2002. As previously stated, the study involved 38 halfway house programs that provided services to parolees and post-release control offenders. This study included roughly 7,000 offenders with half in the treatment group (those offenders who participated in the halfway house program) and half in the comparison group (those offenders who received regular community supervision). The numbers illustrated in the figures in this article represent the difference in the recidivism rate between the treatment and comparison groups.

Figure 1 shows the reduction in recidivism associated with placement and successful termination from a halfway house. As indicated, participation in one of these halfway house programs by low-risk parolees is associated with a decrease in recidivism rates, while participation and successful termination for high-risk offenders has a very different outcome (negative numbers indicate changes in recidivism rates that favor the comparison group whereas positive numbers favor the treatment group). This figure indicates that participation in and successful completion of a halfway house program by low-risk offenders is associated with a 5 percent increase in recidivism rates. Conversely, participation in and completion of the same halfway house programs was associated with a 9 percent decrease in recidivism for high-risk offenders. The one exception to this trend is parole violators: All parole violators, regardless of risk level appeared to have benefited from placement in a residential program compared with similar parolees returned to prison on a parole violation and subsequently released without placement in a residential facility.

Figure 2 illustrates findings regarding the need principle. The number of services each program provided that targeted criminogenic needs was counted. As can be seen in Figure 2, those programs that had one service targeting crim-
The effects of the number of criminogenic services on program effectiveness were examined, and it was found that many of these factors were related to program effectiveness. Some of these important factors include: the program directors' educational and experiential credentials, the program directors' involvement in the program, community support, criminal justice community support, staff training and qualifications, quality assurance and evaluation. Implementation should not be ignored or thought of as a sterile, cookbook process. Failure to properly implement programming can lead to an otherwise promising program to failure (see, for example, Gendreau and Goggin, 2000; Gendreau, Goggin and Smith, 2001; Barsony, 2004).

Finally, a strong relationship between program integrity and program effectiveness (correlation varies between 0.32 to 0.60, depending on the factors used to measure program integrity and the outcome measure used) was found. The highest scoring programs were associated with average reductions in recidivism of 10 percentage points or more (28 percent relative reduction). In contrast, the lowest scoring programs on the measures of program integrity were associated with average increases in recidivism of 19 percentage points.

Summary and Conclusions

The principles and characteristics that have previously been identified as important to correctional interventions in general seem to be applicable and important to programs that serve parolees upon release. More specifically, it was found that the residential programs were most effective with parole violators and higher-risk offenders. Further, the residential programs were associated with a reduction in recidivism for the lower-risk offenders (parole violator exempted). The study also found that services targeting criminogenic needs were related to effectiveness; the most effective programs were those that provided the greatest number of services targeting criminogenic needs. These data also indicated that programs categorized as cognitive-behavioral were more effective, as were those programs that engaged in activities associated with theoretically sound programming (role-playing and practicing of newly learned skills). Finally, it was concluded that implementation and other issues captured by measures of program integrity were strongly related to program effectiveness (for a more detailed review, see Loevendiekamp, 2001) with offenders during the reentry phase. Again it is stressed that these findings are consistent with previous research on correctional interventions.
al interventions — some of which have been around for more than 20 years now.

There is, and has been, a substantial body of research that investigates the effectiveness of different correctional inter-
ventions. While this collection of research is not entirely complete (investigating every detail and source of correc-
tional programming and interactions with offender character-
istics), it is complete enough to guide the development of correctional interventions. It is time that corrections staff
increase the professionalism of the field and begin making evidence-based decisions by relying on, with appropriate
consideration, the relevant research rather than spending their efforts relying on the research and continuing to do things
that simply do not work.

ENDNOTES

1 While it certainly is not the case that all inmates released upon par-

nany, the statistics on the recidivism of inmates released to the community is staggering. For instance, Langis and Lavin (2012)

after following released inmates for three years, found a 67.5 per-

cent re-arrest rate, 23 percent reincarceration rate for a new

crime, and a 20 percent reincarceration rate for a technical viola-
tion. These rates are not all that surprising given the increased

demands on community supervision resources and the reduced

budgest for those state agencies. The expectations to do more

with less, where adaptions are not quickly made, can easily lead to

higher recidivism rates.

2 To this, such correctional expenditures at jails and for chi-

for violent offenders, dressing male offenders in female attire and

having them walk around downtown, sentencing an offender to

physical exercise for trying to outrace the police, and having offend-

ers write 2,500 times, “I will not do stupid things” all could have been

avoided if the judges would have considered the empirical

research rather than be “creative” in their sentencing decisions.

Instead, these creative sentences were abounded by CNN today in

February 2004 and probably served to fuel the lack of confidence

the general public has for the criminal justice system (for pull

results on confidence in U.S. institutions, see Saad, 2004).

Content includes: the assessment and treatment activities of a pro-

gram, or what Plackett (1995) refers to as programmatic factors,

while capacity is concerned with a program’s ability and resources

available (staff, implementation, quality assurance) to deliver a cor-

rectional intervention (Plackett refers to these as programmatic:

factors. For a more detailed discussion and enumeration of these

content and capacity factors, see Lowenkamp, 2004).

3 While there may be other explanations for this finding, it is

believed that it is because dynamic risk factors were present for the

parole violators who were not included in the risk measure.

REFERENCES

Andrews, D.A., and J. Bonta. 1992. The psychology of criminal con-


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