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Sex Offender Management: A Rural Model

APPA Distance Learning Web-cast
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Course Objectives

- Overview of a comprehensive approach to managing sex offenders
- Recognize the importance of Probation's role in community notification and education
- What does research say about the best practice of supervising sex offenders
- What are some practical solutions for tracking sex offender's "red flags"
- How do we provide specialized services while trying to mange increasing caseloads

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About St. Lawrence County

- Located in northern New York along the Canadian border
- Total area is 2,685 square miles with 32 towns, 13 villages, and one city (which means we have over 70 local justices)
- Population of 110,000 with 94% white
- Median household income is $38,510
- Rate of poverty is 17%

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About St. Lawrence County Probation

- 5 Offices located in the main population centers
- 21 Probation Officers, 8 Senior Probation Officers, 5 Probation Assistants, and 3 Probation Supervisors.
- Supervise
  - 1900 probationers
  - 930 Pre-trail offenders
  - 398 JD and PINS
  - Provide 1200 investigations to the courts

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How and Why Did We Engage in this process?

- More sex offenders were being arrested
- We had no specialized services to include assessments, treatment, investigations, prosecution, or supervision
- Sought out funding
- Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) federal SOM Planning and Implementation Grant
- Formed a SOM Team comprised of the heads of all criminal justice agencies and many of the other service providing agencies
- All signed a MOU to collaborate and cooperate in this initiative

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Comprehensive Assessment Protocol (CAP)

- Investigation and Prosecution
- Assessment
- Treatment
- Reentry
- Registration
- Community Notification
- Public Education
- Supervision

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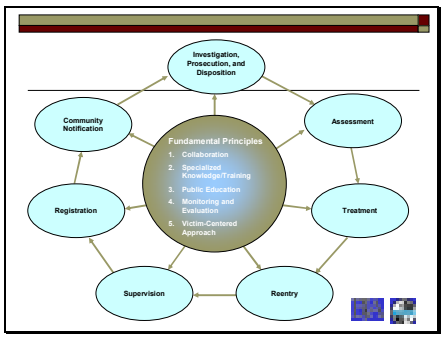

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Evolution of the Field

- **Today**
  - **Continuation of significant advances in theory, research, and practice**
  - **Recognition and consensus among various disciplines that sex offender management is a complex and multi-dimensional issue**
  - **A readiness to address this issue in new and more comprehensive ways in jurisdictions across the country (hot topic)**

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Fundamental Principles

Collaboration

If there is one great hope in this field, it is the emerging recognition among all those who share management responsibilities that this work must be done collaboratively. It cannot be done alone.

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Fundamental Principles

Specialized Knowledge/Training

<u>All</u> those working with sex offenders must develop a specialized knowledge base in order to do their work effectively.

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Fundamental Principles

Public Education

We must be proactive in our efforts to educate our communities about this issue, and to empower them to be a part of the solution to this problem.

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Fundamental Principles

Monitoring and Evaluation

The field will continue to evolve in exciting ways; it is our collective responsibility to continually seek and incorporate new knowledge into our policies and practices, and to monitor the effectiveness and impact of our efforts. We must constantly ask ourselves:

"How can we improve what we are doing?"

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Fundamental Principles

Victim-Centeredness

We must constantly ask ourselves:

"What is in the best interest of the safety of the victim and the public?"

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Myths and Facts

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Best Practices

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Investigation, and Prosecution

- **Thorough investigations are essential.**
  - Clear and consistent policies and procedures must guide various aspects of the investigative process, including interviews with victims, and the alleged offender and collection of key forensic evidence.
  - Multidisciplinary collaboration underlies decision making processes.
  - There must be open lines of communication between prosecutor and police
- **Victim center approach must be the norm.**
  - We must make every effort to assure that victims are supported – and not retraumatized – throughout the phases of the criminal justice process. Sensitivity to the needs and interests of the victims must be emphasized.
  - Orders of protection must be requested upon arrest in all cases

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Investigation, and Prosecution

- **Prosecutorial support is necessary for effective management.**
  - Filing charges that reflect the true nature and severity of the crime validates victims' experiences and sends a message to the community and to the courts that such crimes are taken seriously and will not be tolerated.
  - Ideally a single prosecutor will follow the case from charging, through witness preparation, pre-trial motions, trial and sentencing therefore:
    - Reducing the number of individuals to whom the victim must provide statements
    - Maintaining consistency and continuity of case processing
    - Enhancing victim trust and rapport.

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Assessment

- **Assessments must be comprehensive.** Effective offender assessment is not just about the administration of one or a few instruments. Rather, it is about the collection and synthesis of a wide array of data and information gathered by both treatment providers and criminal justice professionals.
- **Assessments should focus on the critical information we need to effectively intervene with offenders' behavior.** Assessments should target offenders' level of risk, their criminogenic needs, and their responsivity to interventions.
- **Assessments drive the development of case management plans.** The results of offender assessments drive all of our interventions; they are the springboards to the development of an integrated, well-tailored case management plan.

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Assessment

- **Assessment information is cumulative.** Offender assessment is an ongoing process. The information collected over time should be considered additive.
- **Assessment is a dynamic process.** Offenders and their circumstances change over time. Ongoing assessments provide new information that inform the case management process, enabling us to modify interventions depending upon increases and decreases in risk.

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Treatment

- **Treatment goals and interventions are driven by criminogenic needs.** The specific treatment goals – and interventions employed to achieve them – must be tailored to address the individual offenders' specific criminogenic needs (those changeable risk factors that are closely linked to sexual offending behavior).
- **Treatment should be developmentally appropriate.** While there are interventions and targets that overlap for adult and juvenile sex offenders, it is important that treatment for juvenile sex offenders is designed to meet the unique risk and needs of those offenders.

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Treatment

- **"More" treatment is not necessarily "better" or more effective.** The intensity and frequency of treatment should be guided by the risk and needs posed by the individual offender.
- **Treatment is a dynamic process.** Treatment progress should be monitored continuously, and treatment plans must be revised as progress and circumstances change.
- **Treatment is not an isolated activity.** Treatment is only one component of an overall approach to sex offender management. Progress in treatment – as well as concerns that arise in treatment – should inform decisionmaking throughout the system. The treatment process should be closely linked to supervision.

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Reentry

- **Promoting offender success in the community is critical.** Large numbers of offenders are returning to communities from correctional institutions each year. We must make dedicated efforts to facilitate the successful reintegration of these individuals if we wish to end the 'revolving door' phenomenon and seek to enhance long-term community safety.
- **New professional partnerships must be forged.** For offender reentry to be successful, we must forge new relationships between those who work with offenders "inside" and those who work with them "outside." We must overcome the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, and we must rethink our traditions around roles, responsibilities, and information sharing.

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Reentry

- **We must plan ahead – and plan early.** We should plan for offenders' exit as soon as they enter. "Begin with the end in mind." This also requires that we invest time to thoughtfully craft a comprehensive transition plan that makes sense for each individual offender.
- **Community education and involvement are essential.** It is not enough for correctional and treatment staff to work closely to coordinate offenders' transition from institution to community. We must also build relationships with others in the community who can facilitate positive change in offenders' lives.

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Registration

- **Current, accurate registries serve as an important management tool.**
  - Consistent policies and procedures detailing the registration process for offenders as well as the roles of involved agencies.
  - The collection and maintenance of through, accurate and current information on registered sex offenders.
  - Collaboration and coordination of efforts among all the agencies involved in the process to ensure ready access for the purpose of preventing further sexual victimization

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Community Notification

- **Notification should be a collaborative effort.** Community notification may be most impactful when it is conducted in a multi-disciplinary, collaborative fashion in a manner that reduces the potential for unintended consequences for offenders, family members, victims, and the community at large.
- **Community notification is an opportunity for community education.** Notification offers professionals an opportunity to educate community members about sexual abuse, about known vs. unknown offenders, and about the ways citizens protect themselves and their families from sexual victimization.
- **Risk level can drive notification.** Some jurisdictions have found that structuring the notification process – and the methods employed to notify – based upon level of risk to be highly effective.

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Public Education

- **Public education should be a collaborative effort.**
  - Dispel common myths and misperceptions about sex offenders while providing education about effective treatment and strategies.
  - Educate the public about the incidence and prevalence of sexual victimization, including data that suggests that stranger attacks are not commonplace as typically believed.
  - Ensure community members understand the implications of further stigmatizing and ostracizing offenders.

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Community Supervision

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Supervision

- **Sex offender supervision is not "business as usual."**
  - Traditional approaches to supervision cannot meet the unique risks posed by sex offenders. Supervision cannot effectively be conducted on a Monday-Friday, 9-5 schedule, behind one's desk.
  - Specialized supervision strategies are needed such as surveillance, polygraph/voice analyzer, GPS/electric monitoring, computer software technology.
  - Specialized knowledge and training is needed.
  - Specialized conditions of probation should be mandatory.

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Supervision

- **It takes more than one supervision officer to manage a sex offender.**
  - It is necessary to build a case management team that will provide the accountability and support necessary for offenders to succeed.
  - Supervision of sex offenders requires collaboration among criminal justice, treatment, victim advocates, and others to ensure that decisions at all levels are informed by a broader set of perspectives.

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Supervision

- **Offender-specific case management plans must be developed.**
  - As offenders and their environments change (positively or negatively), management plans must be modified accordingly.
  - Supervision and monitoring strategies have become inextricably linked with assessment and treatment approaches to form the cornerstones of effective sex offender management strategies.
  - Drawing on the information gathered through the assessment process, case management plans should be tailored to each offenders' individual risk, needs, and level of responsively.

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How do we implement all this best practice in Probation in rural America on shoe string budgets, with few extra resources, and with increasing caseloads?

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Probation Strategies (no cost)

- Created an initial information sheet which contains "red flags" and a monthly update (Attachment 1)
  - Red flags:
    - Moved
    - New significant other
    - Changed jobs
    - Access to post office box
    - New computer
    - Different computer service provider
    - Changes patterns of reporting schedule

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Probation Strategies (no cost)

- Created a new supervision form (Attachment 2)
  - Easily identifies sex offender risk level
  - Lists orders of protection
  - List review date for DNA/HIV
  - Lists all household members
  - Long range goals
  - Quarterly goals

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Probation Strategies (no cost)

- Created a booklet "Requirements for sex offenders on Probation"
  - Overview: This booklet includes the necessary information for convicted sex offenders to assist them in successfully meeting the requirements imposed upon them by the court. Information is included about sex offender registration requirements, specific orders and conditions of probation, DNA collection, necessary release of information forms, restitution, fees and possession of firearms. An easy checklist is included to ensure sex offenders are aware of and can monitor their responsibilities.
  - A signed acknowledgement statement confirms that the sex offender and supervising PO have reviewed all the responsibilities.

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Probation Strategies (no cost)

- Implemented a policy that requires all sex offenders to participate in a sex offender assessment, and to pay all of or a portion of the costs depending on their financial circumstances.
- Our County Court Judge has now instituted the payment of the full assessment fee ($250) as a condition of supervision.

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Probation Strategies (no cost)

- Implemented the use of a risk assessment tool for probation (attached document)
  - Vermont Assessment of Sex Offender Risk (VASOR) VASOR manual may be obtained from the CSOM website at www.csom.org
  - Risk assessment is conduct during the pre-sentence investigation and is used as another tool to assist in probation's recommendation to the court. Also is used to determine initial supervision level.

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Probation Strategies (no cost)

- Developed new specific conditions of probation for sex offenders based on best practice. (attached document)
- Used Federal Probation to train staff in the use of "SEARCH", a computer software product that can be used to check offenders computers for sexually explicit materials.

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Probation Strategies (no cost)

- Reassigned caseloads so that a limited number of PO's handled all the sex offenders.
- Created a new PO position which has a specialized sex offender population.

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Probation Strategies with costs

- Purchased the software for Voice Stress Analyzer and trained 4 Probation Officers and 1 Parole Officer in the use of Voice Stress Analyzer.
  - We chose this over polygraph due to new research, the use of the equipment by all our police agencies, and the one time cost associated with it. (Polygraph tests in our area run upwards of $500)

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Probation Strategies with costs

- Along with agency treatment providers:
  - We implemented an assessment and treatment protocol in accordance with ATSA guidelines
  - Signed contracts with local providers for the provision of assessment and treatment services.
  - Monitor compliance with protocol and meet monthly with providers.
  - Began an offender education group which PO co-facilitates. (group is for young men having consensual sex with young women)

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Probation Strategies with costs

- Trained PO's, judges, lawyers, prosecutors, and caseworkers on supervision techniques, assessment, treatment models, registration and community notification.
- Created CD's and DVD's of training events for the use in future trainings and reproduced them for other agencies at no charge.

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Other initiatives

- Created a "triage card" for first responders and others which outlines questions and answers for sexual assault victims and list county services and phone numbers.
- Embarked on a public education campaign which included the use of billboards and the development of a website: www.nomorevictimsny.com

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Other initiatives

- Created a community notification form for use by all police agencies so that all notifications were done in the same manner no matter which police agency was responsible for the notification. (attached document)
- Developed and implemented an investigation protocol now used by all sex crimes investigators.
- Created a Special Sex Crime Investigative Unit under the direction to the DA.

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Summary Points

- **No single component – in and of itself – is a sufficient strategy for sex offender management. Effective management is not just about treatment or supervision.**
- **The collective work and expertise of multiple individuals, agencies, and disciplines are critical for effectuating offender accountability and community safety.**
- **Our work must be integrated and collaborative. We cannot be nearly as impactful working in isolation as we can be working together.**
- ***What* we do is just as important as *how* we do it.**