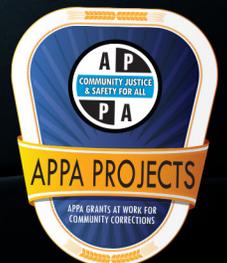


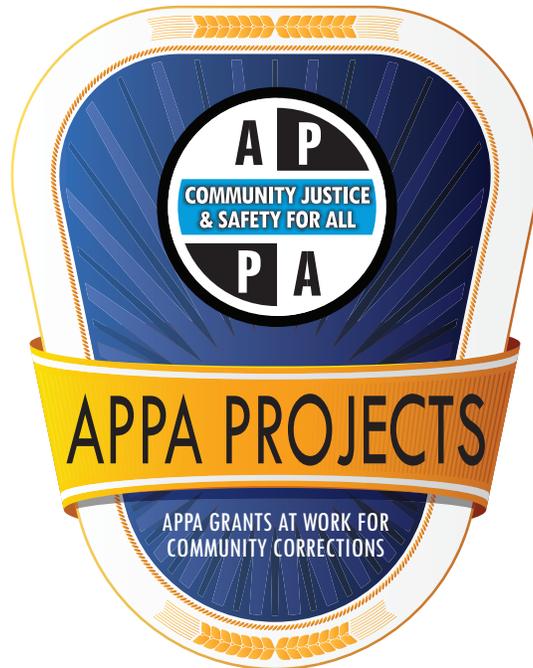
INVOLVING FAMILIES IN CASE PLANNING

by Margaret diZerega



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
U.S. Department of Justice





PUBLISHED FEBRUARY, 2015

This project was supported by Grant No. 2009-AC-BX-K001 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

INVOLVING FAMILIES IN CASE PLANNING

When supervising individuals in a community-based setting, it is essential to leverage the information and resources of people whom the individuals under supervision identify as important in their life. This may include blood relatives, friends, employers/co-workers, mentors, and other significant individuals. These informal networks of support are the ones that influence and motivate us more than anyone else and can play a helpful role in the case planning process. Involving families in the case planning and supervision process can bring both challenges and benefits.

CHALLENGES

- Families may require more of your time by calling with questions about the supervision process or raising concerns about their loved ones.
- Families may feel protective of their loved ones and not be as open with probation as would be ideal.
- Families may have different cultural backgrounds and traditions from probation officers which may affect the supervision process.

BENEFITS

- In addition to providing resources to probationers like transportation, housing, and emotional support, families can also provide information to probation officers about the probationer (e.g., behavioral triggers) as well as cultural involvement/beliefs. This can be especially helpful when you are not a member of the tribe that you work for.
- Families can serve as extra eyes and ears. As a tribal probation officer, you cannot be with each probationer all the time. Families and identified social supports can prove to be beneficial in helping the probationer not only remain compliant and meet supervision goals, but also assist in alerting you when something is not right. For example, an employer may alert you to the fact that the probationer has been showing up to work late the past few days, motivating an impromptu work visit or urinalysis screen. Families can inform you of ways that the probationer is succeeding, providing you the opportunity to further reinforce these behaviors.
- You may be able to connect the family (as a whole) to needed services. For example, if the family is in dire straits financially, connecting them to services to help remedy this situation may result in better compliance from the probationer. Further, it could facilitate a more trusting relationship, allowing probation to provide better support for the person under supervision.

“INCORPORATING THE TOOLS AND METHODS OF THE FAMILY SUPPORT APPROACH HAS HELPED SHOW THE MUCH NEEDED SUPPORT THE PROBATIONERS HAVE AVAILABLE.”

- Tribal probation officer from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe

INVOLVING FAMILIES IN EACH STEP OF THE CASE PLANNING PROCESS

Case planning is a dynamic process that, ideally, is built upon information garnered from administered assessment tools. Once probation officers identify an individual’s needs, they can develop case plan goals with the person under supervision that address identified criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs. It is important to be familiar with evidence-based practices around risk, need, and responsivity¹ and to ensure that goals address an individual’s motivation to change. When drafting and monitoring supervision goals, it is important to discover ways that a probationer’s family and social networks can be utilized to motivate behavior change and encourage compliance.

¹ To read more about practical tips for incorporating the Risk-Need-Responsivity Principles into your supervision practices, the following Bulletin is available for free download: *Risk-Need-Responsivity: Turning Principle Into Practice for Tribal Probation Officers*: www.appa-net.org/eweb/docs/appa/pubs/RNRTPTTP.pdf.

IDENTIFYING SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Before beginning your work with a probationer, one of the first things you should do is let the probationer identify people who can help him or her be successful while on supervision. One way you can help the probationer identify such people is by assisting him or her in completing a family mapping tool such as a genogram or ecomap.² This information can be used to identify strengths in an individual's life that can help in successfully meet supervision goals (for example, transportation to meetings/appointments, connections to obtain employment, or a confidant to talk to when anger issues arise.).

You then want to build on those connections as you develop a case plan. Once the supportive people are identified, it is important to investigate these relationships in more detail to determine the impact they may have on the supervision process.

INVOLVING FAMILIES IN ASSESSMENT AND INTAKE

Once they have been identified, families can play an essential role in informing the assessment and intake process. Families can help fill gaps in information such as past histories of involvement in the justice system (when, for instance, there is a lack of access to criminal history records both on and off the reservation), housing, employment, and educational history (including issues around disciplinary problems, absenteeism, etc.). During the assessment and intake process, families can also share with you behavior triggers and patterns, worries about their own safety (if they were a victim of the present or past offenses), and ways they can be supportive (or not supportive) of the supervision process.

INVESTING IN RELATIONSHIP REPAIR

Without support, families may find it difficult to continue to assist their loved ones. Family members may be burnt-out from past mistreatment from the person on supervision and in some cases may be a victim of the individual on supervision. Part of your role may be to learn what types of support families would find helpful and then to help them identify those supports within local organizations or support groups, if possible. All of this information can help you get a more accurate picture of the probationer with whom you will be working.

“I HAVE FOUND
IT EASIER FOR
THE CLIENT TO
ACCOMPLISH TASKS
WITH THEIR FAMILIES
INVOLVED.”

- Tribal probation officer from the Quileute Tribe

² For more information on developing genograms and ecomaps, please see C. Toner and T. Mullins, “Implementing the Family Support Approach for Community Supervision” available on the APPA website: www.appa-net.org/eweb/docs/APPA/pubs/IFSACS.pdf.

“RATHER THAN TAKING THE OFFENDER’S ‘WORD FOR IT,’ INCLUDING THE FAMILY IN THE INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION GATHERING PORTION, AS WELL AS IMPLEMENTATION OF A CASE PLAN, HAS BEEN HELPFUL BECAUSE RATHER THAN GETTING BUFFETED WITH THE OFFENDER’S COMMENTS SUCH AS, ‘I CAN’T GET A RIDE TO THE THERAPY,’ WHEN THE FAMILY IS INCLUDED, THERE WAS A VARIETY OF RESOURCES THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN UNTAPPED SUCH AS GRANDMA AND THE NEIGHBOR WHO WERE BOTH WILLING AND ABLE TO ASSIST.” – *Tribal Probation Officer*

For example, if you discover that a probationer and his mother, with whom he is living, have loving but tumultuous relationship, you may consider making a referral for family counseling in order for the relationship to function in a supportive manner that will be conducive to positive outcomes for both of them.

There are also times when individuals under supervision indicate that they do not want to involve their families. In such cases, it is good to try to identify the reasons for this.

If an individual is protective of his or her family and does not want to burden them, try to identify whether the resistance truly means that the individual’s family does not want to be involved or that the family is skeptical of the individual’s ability to make a behavioral change. By better understanding the family’s behavior and describing it in different terms, probation officers may be able to identify other ways to invite them into the case planning process.

Sometimes families ask probationers who are struggling with behavior change not to involve them until the probationers have changed. This is a more complex message than “don’t involve my family.” Families are often struggling with the role they play in the individual’s life. However, being brought into the supervision process may give them a role with which they are more comfortable. By joining their loved

ones in meetings with the probation officer, family members can share their expertise about community resources and may return to more supportive communication patterns that can ease strained relationships during and after supervision.

INVOLVING FAMILIES IN CASE PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Whenever possible, involve both the person under supervision and his or her family in the development of the case plan and the prioritization of objectives. Families have important information about the individual under supervision that can be helpful for case planning. For example, they often know about old hangouts or undesirable peers that should be avoided. They also often understand how to motivate their loved one and what he or she really cares about. For example, a man's mother may know how dedicated he is to his young son, and as a result, she may volunteer to supervise their visits and model good parenting skills. She also might suggest that the probation officer talk with her son about how his completion of supervision will affect his ability to regain custody of his son.

Families can be both a supervision asset and barrier. It is important to determine if people identified by the probationer are going to be a support or a disruption to the supervision process. For example, a probationer may share that he has a close relationship with his father. In one case, you may discover that the father is a recovering alcoholic with a long history of sobriety, which could lead to that person being a supportive role model for the individual facing his own alcohol abuse issues. However, if you learn that the father is an active alcoholic, then that relationship may hinder the person from staying sober.

CAPITALIZING ON STRENGTHS

It is important to capitalize on strengths identified from the assessment and intake process during case plan development and monitoring. It is the strengths that people have that get them through the challenges they face in life. As a tribal probation officer, you cannot *force* people to change their behavior while they are on supervision. True behavior change comes from internal motivation to choose a different path and probation officers can use motivational interviewing and other techniques to encourage and reinforce change talk.³ Once strengths of individuals, families, and communities are identified, it is important to help the individual under supervision build on those strengths in the case plan and throughout the monitoring process in a way that will assist him or her in changing behavior and reducing the chance of re-offending. Wherever possible, be intentional with incorporating this type of information by including strategies in the case plan that build on identified strengths and by updating the plan as needed throughout the period of supervision.

³ Motivational interviewing is a way to asking questions and providing statements to build someone's willingness to change their behavior. For more on this technique and how it is applied in community corrections, see Scott T. Walters, Michael D. Clark, Ray Gingerich, and Melissa Meltzer, "Motivating Offenders To Change: A Guide for Probation & Parole Officers" Practice Monograph (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Involving families in the supervision process can be both challenging and rewarding. They can provide valuable insight and support throughout the supervision process, but there are challenges in the dynamics that can arise between the family and the probationer. Through careful planning and communication, you can help the probationer to recognize the supports in his or her life and overcome obstacles that threaten the path toward successful progress in the community.

