

The Construction of a Social Work Service System for Community Corrections

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Abstract: This paper explores the multifaceted role of social work interventions in community corrections, emphasizing the provision of informational, practical, and emotional support to offenders. Social workers act as key facilitators, bridging the gap between offenders and essential resources, services, and networks. By offering tailored support, such as vocational training, psychological guidance, and access to basic needs, social work professionals address offenders' immediate challenges while fostering long-term independence and social reintegration. Additionally, social workers mobilize formal and informal resources to create a supportive environment that reduces recidivism risk. The ethical foundation of social work underscores the importance of advocating for systemic change, aiming to eliminate discrimination and enhance the societal acceptance of offenders. This paper concludes by underscoring the indispensable role of social work in building inclusive systems that empower offenders to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.

Keywords: Community Corrections; Social Work; Correctional Work

1. Introduction

Community corrections, as opposed to custodial corrections, refer to a form of penal execution that places eligible offenders within the community. Under the supervision of specialized state agencies, and with the assistance of relevant social organizations, civil groups, and social volunteers, community corrections aim to rehabilitate offenders' criminal mentality and behavioral issues during the period determined by judicial decisions. It is a non-custodial penalty enforcement activity that seeks to facilitate the offenders' smooth reintegration into society. Community corrections rely on the community as a platform, employing scientific values and professional methodologies to restore offenders' social functioning and ensure their reintegration into society as part of the penal execution system and process.

As a novel method of penal execution, community corrections supervise offenders sentenced to control, probation, parole, or temporary suspension of sentence outside prison. The judicial administrative organs, with support from social organizations, civil groups, and social volunteers, work to rectify offenders' criminal psychology and undesirable behaviors, enabling their successful reintegration into society [23]. Community corrections represent a model that leverages social resources to implement correctional services within communities [13]. As a non-custodial penalty system, its core aim is to address offenders' thoughts and behaviors through education and assistance, solving problems, restoring functionality, promoting social reintegration, and preventing recidivism [11].

Social work in community corrections refers to specialized social work services conducted in the field of community corrections. Social workers apply professional knowledge and methods to help offenders restore social functionality and facilitate their reintegration into social activities [28]. Community corrections possess dual characteristics of penal execution and rehabilitation, embodying a multifaceted system that integrates punishment, penal execution, restoration of offenders' social functioning, and societal reconstruction. Although scholars describe this concept differently, they consistently emphasize the critical elements of utilizing formal and informal resources within the community to deliver correctional services, achieve rehabilitative outcomes, and promote offenders' smooth reintegration into society. Community corrections thereby serve dual purposes: penal execution and social welfare.

2. Current Status and Challenges of Community Corrections

The professional positioning and competencies of community corrections staff remain insufficient to meet the demands of their responsibilities [20]. Issues include a lack of professional knowledge in social work and misalignment between personal values and the values required for their work [6]. Many individuals involved in community corrections services or management lack professional training, rendering them unprepared to effectively fulfill their roles [24]. Social work is not yet regarded or utilized as a professional force in this field, and the work performed often lacks a demonstration of professional expertise [7]. Meanwhile, professionals who do exhibit expertise tend to leave the field due to low wages, resulting in an inability to retain skilled talent.

Funding for community corrections services is also inadequate. Although policies emphasize the need to ensure funding, their implementation is often contingent on local government budgets, making financial and staffing support for community corrections inconsistent [8]. In some areas, community corrections programs rely on temporary funding or reallocation of resources from other operations, limiting the scope and quality of services. Disparities in the ratio of offenders to enforcement staff, insufficient facilities, inadequate financial investment, and relatively crude management models further constrain the effectiveness of these programs [4]. While volunteer teams supported by association funding or social donations may alleviate some financial pressures, activities such as training and evaluation are frequently discontinued due to a lack of funds.

The resources available to offenders during the correctional process are often limited, leading to poor outcomes. Few offenders receive clinically meaningful services. Research indicates that individuals transitioning from correctional facilities to the community utilize an average of only two to five hours of mental health services per month. Access to various health services remains a significant challenge, especially in rural areas, where individuals struggle to locate and receive adequate care to address their needs [12].

3. Compatibility Between Social Work and Community Corrections

Social work aligns closely with the values of community corrections. Guided by its ethical principles, including "helping people help themselves" and a strengths-based perspective, social work provides non-discriminatory professional services using its three core methods [15]. Judicial social work emphasizes individuals' potential and developmental abilities, guiding offenders toward positive change. Correctional workers play a significant role in shaping offenders' behaviors and values. Social work's values of human-centeredness, equality, and respect facilitate the reintegration of offenders into society.

The practices and methods of social work effectively meet the demands of community corrections. As a profession rooted in altruism and supported by scientific knowledge and methodologies, social work is characterized by its multidimensional roles, comprehensive functions, and evidence-based practices. These attributes make it uniquely advantageous in the context of community corrections [19]. Social work interventions empower offenders to regain self-reliance and restore their social functionality [2]. Furthermore, social work serves as an effective approach to enhancing public acceptance of community corrections. While the success of community corrections relies on public participation, traditional perceptions often result in low acceptance of offenders. Social work, deeply embedded in grassroots communities and supported by strong community foundations, is uniquely positioned to transform public attitudes and increase engagement in community corrections [26].

Interventions in community corrections should adopt a multi-modal approach. For instance, casework can tailor individualized service plans for offenders, group work can foster mutual support among offenders, and community work focuses on providing resources and building social support networks. Practical techniques in social work, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and crisis intervention, offer professional support for correctional services [5]. Offenders often have pressing needs for education, training, employment, and trauma treatment [9]. Community-based social workers play an essential role in addressing these needs, particularly by targeting factors that promote employment, health, and independent living [16]. The importance of social support in desistance has been increasingly recognized in criminological theory [1], and social work's emphasis on constructing social support networks aligns seamlessly with these needs.

4. Insights for Social Work in Community Corrections

Legislative Measures to Ensure the Legitimacy of Social Workers in Community Corrections. To solidify the role of social workers in community corrections, legislation should first establish the legal status of social work in this field, enabling social workers to operate with authority derived from public mandates or delegations of power. Additionally, clear definitions of rights and obligations, such as professional certification and adherence to legal responsibilities, should be outlined^[22]. Social work-specific positions should be established within community corrections agencies, with explicit job descriptions and professional social workers hired to fill these roles^[18]. The professional services and skill training provided by social workers should be integrated into the evaluation criteria of community corrections programs^[10]. A standardized selection and appointment process for social workers is essential to distinguish their roles from those of auxiliary personnel and volunteers. Professionals should possess relevant vocational certifications to ensure expertise, fostering a team that is both professional and professionalized^[14]. Furthermore, technological tools should be incorporated to enhance oversight and operational efficiency^[3].

Improving the Effectiveness of Training for Community Corrections Staff. Higher education institutions should offer relevant courses to improve the professional competence of community corrections staff. Additionally, regular training sessions should be conducted to encourage ongoing skill enhancement. This training can be delivered through pre-employment programs, on-the-job training, and diverse learning formats, including role rotations. Building a competent community corrections workforce requires both official initiatives and strengthened training programs for volunteers^[20]. Experts from universities, research institutions, and experienced practitioners from prisons and rehabilitation centers can contribute to the professional development of community corrections staff through tailored training programs^[25].

Establishing Specialized Social Work Service Programs. Dedicated social work service programs should be implemented, including psychological and behavioral correction projects, social reintegration programs, social adaptability enhancement initiatives, and one-on-one correction plans^[27]. Social work theories should be innovatively applied to address emerging challenges. The traditional problem-focused perspective may not effectively resolve all issues and can often perpetuate new ones. In contrast, a strengths-based approach focuses on identifying and utilizing the positive resources of offenders, unlocking their potential to foster resilience and encourage personal growth.

5. Social Work Service Content in Community Corrections

5.1. Direct and Indirect Services of Social Work

Social work employs three core professional methods: casework, group work, and community work. Casework in corrections enables one-on-one interactions with offenders, allowing for the development of personalized correction plans and support strategies. Group work in corrections provides a group environment where offenders with similar experiences can offer mutual support, encourage one another, and achieve behavioral change. Community work in corrections focuses on identifying and mobilizing community and social resources to build social support networks that facilitate the offender's resocialization process.

These methods range from micro- to macro-level approaches, shifting the focus from individuals to their broader environment. Combining these methods prevents the fragmentation of service provision between the offender and their surroundings. Viewing offenders as individuals embedded in their environment allows social workers to recognize the influence of external factors on their thoughts and behaviors, maximizing environmental strengths. For instance, integrating families as a key element in the correction process enables families to collaborate with correctional agencies in designing tailored correction plans, aiding offenders in adapting to society^[21].

Social work's indirect contributions include enhancing the effectiveness of training for community corrections staff. One of the key roles of social work is resource linkage, and volunteer resources constitute a vital human resource in this regard. Social workers are also tasked with training volunteers, which is critical for formalizing volunteer management. By providing structured knowledge training, social work professionalizes volunteer services. This, in turn, strengthens the support provided to correctional staff and helps achieve the overarching goals of the correctional process.

5.2. Diverse Social Work Interventions

From the perspective of intervention content, social work engagement is multidimensional and extensive. Community corrections offenders often face limited access to information, with constrained and isolated channels for obtaining it. This lack of information can directly impair their ability to secure resources and opportunities. In this context, social workers play a pivotal role as information gatherers and disseminators, providing critical informational support to offenders.

This support includes organizing targeted workshops on employment, legal aid, and community resources, as well as compiling and distributing comprehensive directories of available community services and resources. These efforts help offenders navigate various dimensions of social life, empowering them to better integrate into society.

Additionally, social workers can act as case managers, not only conveying information but also assisting offenders in accessing and connecting with necessary social services. Providing information is more than a matter of sharing knowledge; it is a critical step in solving practical problems. This approach integrates informational support with service linkage, enabling offenders to gradually adapt to the complexities of the social environment.

Furthermore, social workers can leverage their professional networks to mobilize broader social resources, creating an external environment conducive to offenders' survival and development. While informational support may not directly resolve all the challenges offenders face, it serves as a "bridge" to various resources and opportunities. This creates space for exploring future possibilities and provides clear guidance in times of difficulty. By offering solutions to pressing needs, social workers enhance offenders' social adaptability and foster their capacity for self-development.

5.3. Social Work Interventions by Support Type

If informational support can be seen as "teaching a person to fish," providing long-term benefits, then direct, tangible assistance serves as "giving a person a fish," addressing immediate and pressing needs. While informational support is invaluable, practical aid can help community corrections offenders meet their basic needs and manage urgent situations effectively. Many offenders face significant challenges, such as financial instability, lack of stable housing, and insufficient social security. These factors can place them in high-risk situations, increasing the likelihood of recidivism.

In this context, social workers play a vital role by providing essential resources such as food, housing, and financial assistance to help offenders stabilize their lives. This support extends beyond directly supplying material resources or funds. It also involves connecting offenders with relevant agencies and services. Social workers mobilize community resources, collaborate with government departments and social organizations, and secure broader support systems such as legal aid, medical services, and vocational training. These efforts provide offenders with sustainable means to maintain their livelihoods.

Moreover, practical support is not limited to short-term aid. Social workers can also enhance offenders' employability through skill training and educational guidance, helping them secure stable income sources. Such long-term strategies aim to reduce offenders' dependence on external assistance, enabling them to achieve self-reliance and better social integration. By addressing immediate needs and building capacity for future independence, social workers create favorable conditions for offenders to rebuild their social identities and reintegrate into society.

However, human needs go beyond material considerations, and emotional support is equally crucial. All individuals, including community corrections offenders, require emotional support, and the unique challenges of their circumstances often intensify this need. Emotional support is a vital component of social work, especially in addressing the emotional and psychological issues offenders may face. During the correctional process, offenders may experience loneliness, anxiety, guilt, and other complex emotions. By providing empathetic listening and expressing genuine care, social workers offer offenders essential psychological relief and support.

Through active listening, social workers convey messages of concern and solidarity, helping offenders feel less isolated. This listening process is not merely a casual conversation; it is an interactive engagement involving deep understanding and empathy. By attentively listening to offenders' inner struggles and emotional needs, social workers can provide tailored emotional guidance and support.

Positive social interactions are another important aspect of emotional support. Social workers regularly engage offenders in constructive communication, fostering a sense of acceptance and care.

Emotional support is not solely a one-way provision; it often involves establishing a reciprocal relationship. Through these interactions, offenders gradually recognize and value the relationships they build with social workers, feeling understood and respected. This fosters emotional recovery and facilitates behavioral correction. Additionally, social workers can help offenders build broader social support networks by repairing or strengthening relationships with family, friends, and the community. Such connections enhance their sense of belonging and emotional security.

Beyond their individual roles, social workers must mobilize both formal and informal support networks for offenders. This involves connecting offenders to formal resources to ensure they benefit from general or targeted policies. At the same time, social workers should educate and train informal support providers to ensure their well-intentioned efforts yield positive outcomes rather than unintended harm. Social workers also guide offenders in discerning the quality of their social circles, encouraging them to distance themselves from individuals or groups that might have negative influences.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) emphasizes in its Code of Ethics preamble that the mission of social work includes meeting the needs of marginalized, oppressed, and impoverished populations while empowering them. It further underscores the importance of considering environmental forces that create, exacerbate, or resolve life challenges. The Code of Ethics asserts that social workers have a moral obligation to participate in social change efforts ^[17].

This reminder highlights the dual focus of social work: empowering individual clients and addressing systemic issues. Social workers must not only empower offenders but also extend their scope to advocate for social change. By fostering an environment more inclusive and supportive of offenders, such efforts aim to eliminate discrimination and assist them in reintegrating into society. Through this dual approach, social workers play an indispensable role in addressing both individual needs and societal barriers.

6. Conclusion

Social work interventions play a vital and multidimensional role in addressing the challenges faced by community corrections offenders, offering comprehensive support that integrates their immediate needs with long-term rehabilitation goals. Through direct and indirect methods, social workers provide a wide range of services, including informational, practical, and emotional support, to facilitate offenders' reintegration into society.

Informational support addresses offenders' limited access to knowledge and opportunities, equipping them with resources and guidance for navigating complex social systems. By organizing seminars, disseminating resource directories, and offering personalized consultations, social workers enable offenders to make informed decisions and access essential services. This type of intervention strengthens offenders' ability to participate actively in society and build sustainable livelihoods.

Practical support, on the other hand, focuses on meeting immediate and pressing needs. Social workers assist offenders in securing basic necessities such as food, housing, and financial aid while also linking them to broader resources like legal aid, healthcare, and vocational training. These efforts not only stabilize offenders' lives in the short term but also foster self-reliance and reduce their reliance on external aid over time.

Equally critical is emotional support, which addresses the psychological and emotional challenges offenders often experience during the correctional process. Through active listening, empathetic engagement, and fostering positive interactions, social workers help offenders cope with feelings of isolation, anxiety, and guilt. Moreover, by facilitating the restoration of familial and community relationships, social workers enhance offenders' sense of belonging and emotional security.

Beyond individual interventions, social workers play a broader societal role by advocating for systemic change to create an inclusive and supportive environment for offenders. Mobilizing both formal and informal networks, social workers ensure that offenders benefit from general and targeted policies while educating informal support providers to maximize the effectiveness of their contributions. By addressing structural barriers and fostering societal acceptance, social workers help offenders overcome discrimination and reintegrate successfully.

In conclusion, the role of social work in community corrections extends beyond addressing individual needs to encompass systemic advocacy and change. By integrating diverse interventions and fostering an inclusive environment, social workers empower offenders to rebuild their lives, reduce the risk of recidivism, and contribute positively to their communities. This comprehensive approach highlights the

transformative potential of social work in creating a society that values rehabilitation and reintegration over punishment and exclusion.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the project "Research on Multidimensional Social Support and Social Work Intervention for Community Corrections Offenders" (Grant No. JCFXFK24-10B) in 2024, funded by Leshan Normal University and the Sichuan Provincial Department of Education's Key Research Base for Humanities and Social Sciences—Sichuan Grassroots Social Risk Prevention and Control Governance Research Center.

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