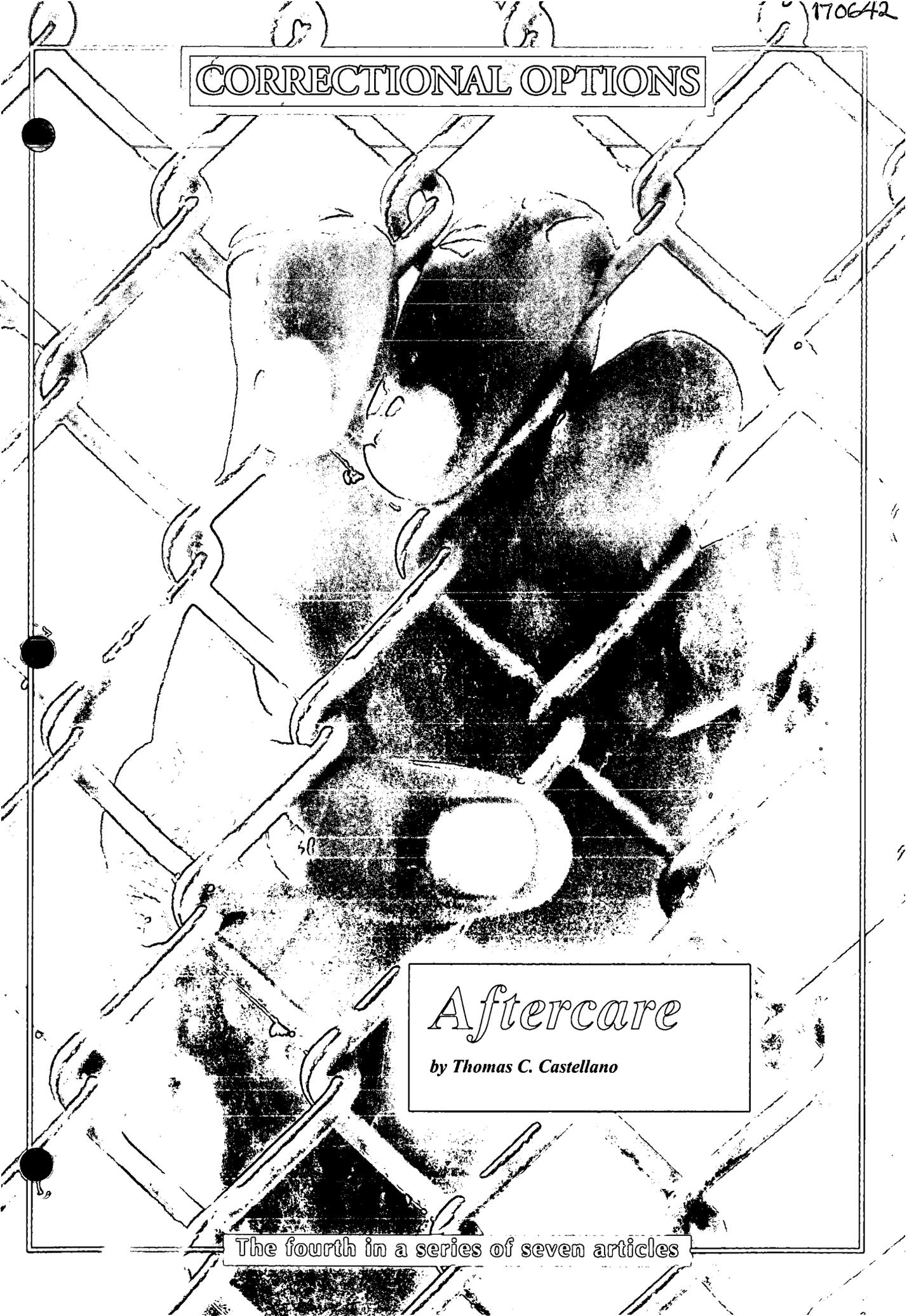


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CORRECTIONAL OPTIONS



Aftercare

by Thomas C. Castellano

The fourth in a series of seven articles

Most corrections professionals have long recognized aftercare as an important part of reintegrating newly released offenders into the community. In the past 20 years or so, however, corrections has focused on deterrence, incapacitation and “just deserts,” giving relatively little attention to aftercare programming.



Courtesy Bruce Orenstein

Aftercare programs should not only link ex-offenders to job training but also teach them the skills—interviewing, resume writing, etc.—needed to get work in the first place.

Although prisons have been built right and left and budgets for institutional corrections have skyrocketed in that time, parole budgets, staff and programming efforts have declined dramatically. The same applies to the number of halfway houses, work release and furlough programs, and other staples of

“community corrections” designed to assist offenders in making a smooth transition to the community after serving their terms. In many instances, offenders are released into the community with little more than a bus or train ticket and a token amount of cash in hand. In many states, parole services and supervision have become illusory.

But after years of neglect, aftercare programming for offenders may be making a comeback. Many jurisdictions are beginning to experiment with innovative post-release services and supervision programs for offenders—or at least for special classes of offenders.

What Is Aftercare?

“Aftercare” is not a term that has been commonly used in adult corrections. The term is more common in the addictions treatment area, where it has been associated with rehabilitative ideology and the belief that institutional treatment interventions are unlikely to change offenders unless coupled with community-based treatment. For example, addictions treatment providers believe that continuing care during transition and return to the community, along with a lengthy period of supervision in the community, is an integral part of an effective treatment program (National Institute of Corrections 1991; Wellisch, Anglin and Pendergast 1993; Peters 1993). Moreover, they also realize the need to make plans early on for transitioning individuals into the community, with the community providing the resources necessary to meet their particular treatment needs.

Juvenile aftercare programs adhere to similar principles. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention recently sponsored the development of a model intensive aftercare program for high-risk juveniles. The model was designed in part to address one of the major problems besetting the juvenile correctional system—“the inability to transition offenders from closely monitored and highly regimented life in a secure institutional environment to unstructured and often confusing life in a community. The difficulties

posed in providing continuity of service and supervision between institutional confinement and community living have long plagued efforts to successfully achieve successful community adjustment for juvenile offenders" (Altschuler and Armstrong 1994). This statement applies equally well to adult corrections.

"Aftercare" thus is a term that generally is linked to a rehabilitative goal and implies much more than traditional parole surveillance and supervision. Aftercare's essence is "care," usually conceived of in terms of interventions that directly tackle the offender's problems. Community-based treatment, continuity of care, offender assessment and classification, and case management are commonly viewed as essential elements of an effective after-care program.

Some would argue further that because an offender's successful adjustment is determined largely by what happens on the street—and not in prison—the period of aftercare should be comparable to or longer than the period of incarceration. For the same reason, aftercare should be even more intensive than the programming the offender received while incarcerated.

Clearly, the challenges in developing effective aftercare programming today are formidable, especially because offender-based interventions in adult corrections, despite the rhetoric, have never been firmly anchored in rehabilitative ideology—in the idea that the goal of corrections is to change people for the better. The link between offender programming in correctional institutions and that delivered in the community always has

been tenuous. That link has become even weaker due to recent trends in parole supervision.

Trends in Parole Supervision

Aftercare in adult corrections has been

loosely identified with parole supervision, and parole supervision has dramatically changed in the United States during the past 20 years. Most of these changes are inconsistent with the development of bona fide after-care programs.

During this time, parole supervision has come under attack from many quarters. As Ringel, Cowles and Castellano (1994) state, "Crime control advocates have denounced parole supervision as being largely nominal and ineffective; due process advocates have criticized parole revocation as arbitrary and counterproductive; social welfare advocates have decried the lack of meaningful and useful rehabilitation services. These criticisms have acquired added forcefulness as the number of offenders under criminal justice supervision reaches

In 1990, the U.S. Congress authorized the Correctional Options Program in response to the pervasive problem of prison and jail crowding and the high recidivism rate of youthful offenders incarcerated in traditional correctional institutions. With this authorization, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) was charged with providing financial and technical assistance to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to deal with these issues.

BJA has defined correctional options as cost-effective interventions that reduce reliance on traditional modes of incarceration while, at the same time, enhance the reintegration of offenders into the community. These interventions include community-based alternatives to incarceration, institution-based treatment or training programs, early release for offenders with intensive re-entry services and supervision, or a combination of such programs.

BJA has structured the program in three parts. Part 1 grants encourage the development and implementation of innovative correctional options within existing correctional systems. Part 2 grants support nonprofit organizations providing research, training and technical assistance in coordination with correctional options projects. Part 3 grants support innovative boot camps that further the program's goals.

a new height thereby straining even further what many already viewed as inadequate system resources."

States have responded to this criticism in a variety of ways. Some jurisdictions have abolished parole supervision altogether. Maine, for instance, eliminated parole supervision, without witnessing an increase in crime. It is not commonly recognized, however, that through the latter half of the 1980s less than 40 percent of Maine's prisoners were unconditionally released into the com-

munity. A vast majority of those conditionally released were placed on probation after their term of imprisonment expired (i.e., judicial parole). Thus, the state modified its criminal justice system to ensure the continuance of at least some of the functions of parole supervision before abolishing it (Krajick 1983; see

release center, being placed on electronic monitoring or having frequent visits from a supervising officer. Intensifying surveillance also has been seen as a way to reduce the revocation rate of parolees, which has further compounded institutional crowding problems.



During its three-phase program, the Bradenton Drug Treatment Community seeks to foster a sense of belonging among the young offenders.

also Bottomly 1990).

Other jurisdictions have attempted to remedy the deficiencies of the parole system in patchwork fashion. A favorite strategy has been to introduce intensive supervision programs (ISPs) for high-risk offenders—even though empirical research on the effectiveness of parole supervision as a method of reducing recidivism has been equivocal at best. The most that can be concluded from extant research is that traditional supervision practices may delay recidivism for a relatively short period of time for certain offenders.

These jurisdictions have seen ISPs as a way to treat high-risk offenders—such as drug abusers and sex offenders—and to maintain strict surveillance over those offenders most likely to slip up. Offenders often are mandated to participate in specialized treatment, such as sexual offender therapy or drug treatment, while receiving a concentrated form of controlled supervision, such as being confined in a community

Recent research on parole supervision has focused on ISPs. The results have not been very encouraging. In a 1988 study, the Rand Corporation set up a randomized experiment to compare, among other things, the recidivism rates of intensive versus regular supervision parolees in Texas. The results show ISPs are effective in ensuring more treatment and implementing more surveillance (Turner and Petersilia 1992). However, ISPs increase rather than decrease recidivism, mainly because ISP offenders are revoked for more technical violations, especially drug use. Unfortunately, the assumed benefits of intensive supervision for public safety have not been found: There is little to indicate that such programs reduce the recidivism rate of parolees.

Some argue that these negative results have been caused by the overriding emphasis most ISPs have placed on the surveillance, control and punitive functions of community supervision. They contend that supervision

Courtesy Florida Department of Corrections

programs that merge control with rehabilitation are more likely to achieve favorable results (see Gendreau, Cullen and Bonta 1994). Earlier studies that examined intensive supervision and mandated treatment of drug offenders suggest they may be right. Coupled with studies that indicate probationers who received more treatment as part of their probation performed better than those who received less treatment (Petersilia and Turner 1993), there is reason to believe that ISPs, which demand offender treatment, may promote beneficial results in terms of reduced recidivism.

Nonetheless, few, if any, jurisdictions have implemented aftercare programs that provide a continuity of care between institutional and community-based programming for the vast majority of adult prison releasees. Rarely have we witnessed aftercare programs for adult offenders that involve the intensive delivery of treatment services which build on meaningful rehabilitative efforts begun in prison. Some jurisdictions, however, with the encouragement of the federal government, have begun to implement such aftercare programs.

The Federal Role in Promoting Aftercare

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has defined correctional options as cost-effective interventions that reduce reliance on traditional modes of incarceration while, at the same time, enhance the reintegration of offenders into the community. Some of the interventions funded by BJA's Correctional Options program include intensive re-entry services and supervision for offenders released from incarceration. The targeted population tends to be young, less serious offenders who are released from prison earlier than normal, often as a "back-door" prison population control method (but sometimes as a "front-door" method as well).

Although not a central feature of the prison provisions of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, the federal government is encouraging the implementation of strong aftercare programming, as evidenced by statutory language that

defines correctional boot camps. Within this legislation, boot camps are partially defined by the presence of "post-incarcerative aftercare services for participants that are coordinated with the program carried out during the period of imprisonment" (Title II, Subtitle A, Sec. 20108). Thus, as it stands, only boot camps with an aftercare component will be funded under this legislation.

Moreover, the 1994 legislation demands that jurisdictions receiving federal dollars develop comprehensive correctional plans. These plans will need to include integrated approaches to managing and operating correctional facilities and programs. Within the listed programs are "a pre-release prisoner assessment to provide risk reduction management" and "post-release assistance" (Title II, Subtitle A, Sec. 20101). Although the 1994 crime bill is certainly driven more by the goal of increasing prison capacity, the federal government nonetheless has recognized the need for developing transitional programming.

Florida Treatment Community Links Programming

Not all of the correctional options programs funded by BJA contain aftercare programming efforts. Some of the programs target probationers who have not been incarcerated (for example, Alameda County, Calif., has structured a sentencing program for youthful drug offenders), and, thus, aftercare is not applicable. All of the funded programs that target jail and/or prison inmates, however, include at least some level of aftercare. But some have adhered to the principles of effective aftercare programming better than others.

An excellent example of a program that links institutional and community programs is the Bradenton Drug Treatment Community. The Florida Department of Corrections' (DOC) Probation and Parole Services received a BJA grant for \$2.47 million to initiate a three-phase drug treatment program for offenders from a 14-county region. The prime targets of this program are offenders aged 24 or younger who have tested positive for drugs, who are on probation or under

cy's evaluation of the Correctional Options program concluded, "[I]t must be noted that the greatest obstacle for these programs remains the aftercare component. The level of services provided in residential based program components was substantial and appropriate. However, once the offenders enter the aftercare or community based phases of the programs, the levels of supervision and service delivery decline rapidly."

If this is the case for Correctional Options programs, the situation is undoubtedly even more dire for the tens of thousands of offenders annually released to our streets who do not participate in these or similar programs. So, although aftercare *may* be making a comeback, it also is clear that it has a long way to go.

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Participants in the Bradenton Drug Treatment Community, and others like it, will likely stand a better chance of becoming law-abiding, productive citizens thanks to the facility's integrated aftercare program.

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