Sex Offenders in Recovery:
Solving the Housing Conundrum

Prisoner Reentry Initiative
Educational & Networking Symposium:
“Sex Offender Reentry”
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Presented by

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A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Science is now available online: *Preventing Sex-Offender Recidivism Through Therapeutic Jurisprudence Approaches and Specialized Community Integration.*

The authors are Heather Cucolo & Michael L. Perlin -- *New York Law School*

Here's how the article ends:

“Therapeutic jurisprudence instructs us to step back from myths and prevailing attitudes and to carefully consider the prescriptions of TJ principles. Recall the 'three Vs' -- voice, validation and voluntariness -- that [we] discussed. The current sex offender laws honor none of these prescriptions. It is time we seriously re-evaluated them all. We must educate ourselves, confront our fears and resist the urge to succumb to reactionary responses. These emotionally charged issues must be dealt with through rational solutions directed towards protecting potential victims while preserving the human rights of all.”
There are many types of sex offenders: It is not “one size fits all”.

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Introduction

There are many types of sex offenders: It is not “one size fits all”.

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Housing Barriers

The housing need is exacerbated by a combination of:

• legislated residency restrictions
• extreme disenfranchisement and alienation
• multiple barriers to reentry
• poverty
What It Will Take

We can’t wait until “the laws change.” We have to create solutions and workable options today, even with seemingly impossible barriers to overcome.
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Values You Will Need

Solving the sex offender housing conundrum is not for everyone.

You will need a strong dose of each of the following values:

• Perseverance
• Creativity
• Innovation
• A team-based approach
• The patience to build quality relationships with stakeholders in the community
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Keys to Working with Law Enforcement

- Get to know the higher-ups
- Let them know what you are building
- Offer to be transparent and pro-active
- Come in a spirit of cooperation and partnership
- Always err on the side of communication, honesty, and humility
7 Housing Best Practices

Best practices from across the nation are starting to emerge. These are best expressed in seven different housing configurations, with specific examples of each one.
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#1 – Transitional Housing for Reentry

- The best case scenario is that Probation & Parole has a “preferred vendor” that specializes in sex offender reentry
- Program may have program fees
- A structured environment with high accountability
- Example: New Name House in Ft. Worth
- Close working relationship with law enforcement
- Capacity: 13  Term: 12 months
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#2 – Emergency Shelter

• In Oklahoma County (and everywhere else in Oklahoma) there is no emergency shelter or rescue mission that will take anyone with a sex offense in their background – period.

• Homeless sex offenders are forced to live “under the bridge” – which is not good public policy from anyone’s perspective.

• 120 homeless sex offenders in Oklahoma County at last count

• The only option: Weekly motels ($220+)
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#3 – Residential Therapeutic Programs

- Private, treatment-based program
- Requires different levels of care and treatment for different categories of sexual deviancy
- None exists in Oklahoma
- Example: The most respected in the nation is Alpha Human Services in Minneapolis
- In Oklahoma, this should be a joint venture between ODOC, ODMHSAS, and the faith community
#4 – The Sober-Living Model

- For stable individuals, who have income from work or disability
- The next level up from the transitional housing model, for program “graduates”
- A self-governing home structure, usually 6-10 residents (men)
- Example: SLA’s in Colorado
  - dcj.state.co.us/odvsom/sex_offender/SO_Pdfs/SLA%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf
  - “A Shared Living Arrangement (SLA) is a separately contained living unit in which more than one adult sex offender in treatment resides for the purpose of increased public and community safety, increased accountability, intensive containment, and more consistent treatment interventions, provided by treatment providers that are approved through the Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB).”
#5 – Assisted Living Centers

- With the increase of sex offenders in society, the physically disabled, respite care, and geriatric patients that are sex offenders are only going to increase.
- Not one single nursing home, assisted living center, or retirement center in Oklahoma will take a sex offender.
- There is also a crisis in respite care.
- The Okla. Dept. of Health and others should take a hard look at this critical need.
#6 – Independent Living in Urban Areas

- In Oklahoma City, there are a number of “green zones” – areas that are outside the residency restriction of “2,000 feet from any school, park, or state-authorized daycare”
- In Tulsa, not so much
- If a sex offender has income and transportation, there are a number of housing options, including sympathetic landlords, mobile homes, and apartments, although the apartments are extremely scarce and have waiting lists
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#7 – Independent Living in Rural Areas

• In rural areas, the residency restriction still applies

• Many sex offenders live in small towns, primarily to be near family, but have reduced access to jobs, services, supervision, and therapy

• If a sex offender is homeless, penniless, and has no family, they need to move from a rural area to an urban area in order to have at least a chance at getting some services and support
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Conclusion

Some related issues that we will not cover but should be considered by recovery practitioners and policy makers:

- Civil Commitment: Pro’s and Con’s
- Housing & Support of Mentally Disabled Sex Offenders
- Challenges in Employment: Is Self-Employment an Answer?