



The Green Sheet

November 2009 - Volume 2

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Effective Parole Systems Don't Just Happen

The field of parole, like most professions, has undergone many changes over the years. The efforts to reduce recidivism, and the failure of many of those efforts, has caused the pendulum to swing from the belief that "everything works" to believing "nothing works."

Today, fortunately, public policy research and practice about effective parole systems has come a long way. In December 2008, The PEW Center on the States released a public safety brief *Putting Public Safety First: 13 Strategies for Successful Supervision and Reentry*, which summarizes the latest research and best practices about how probation and parole systems can improve their outcomes.

As part of its endeavor to improve outcomes, the Board continually examines and refines its policies, procedures and practices in light of the latest research and has implemented many changes.

Below is a description of how the Board's changes align with PEW's 13 strategies:

1. Define Success as Recidivism Reduction and Measure Performance

According to the PEW brief, "In order to accomplish their public safety mission, parole and probation agencies should adopt risk reduction and behavior change strategies and measure their performance against the standard of recidivism reduction, substance abuse, employment, victim restitution and other reintegration outcomes."

The Board's goal is the reduction of recidivism. And it has adopted "risk reduction and behavior change strategies" to help the offender lead a law abiding lifestyle through the application of evidence based practices.

To evaluate these new strategies, several performance measures have been developed.

Some recent key performance measures are:

- The Board's one year recidivism rate has dropped from 28% in 2003, where it had remained for three years, to 21% in 2008.



Edward G. Rendell
Governor

Catherine C. McVey
Chairman

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From the Desk of the Chairman

On Friday, October 16, 2009, the Board held its first-ever regional parole symposium at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. The goal of the symposium was to provide information about the state parole system and to engage in discussions regarding specific parole related topics of local or regional interest.

Hosted by Duquesne University School of Law and the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania the event was attended by approximately 80 judges, prosecutors, public defenders, county probation

and parole officers and police officers.

The positive feedback we have received signals to me there is a tremendous need and desire to better understand how the state parole system works. I believe a greater understanding of the parole system by citizens and stakeholders will result in a more effective criminal justice system. The knowledge that participants gained at this symposium can now be used in their area of work within the system.

As part of the Board's goal to become more transparent, we are



Catherine C. McVey
Board Chairman

planning additional symposiums across the state next year. We look forward to seeing you there!

Effective Parole Systems Don't Just Happen

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· The number of offenders who successfully completed parole in FY 08/09 was 6,629, a 21% increase since FY 05/06.

· Last fiscal year, 93% of 109,513 drug tests to detect illegal drugs were negative.

· The employment rate for parolees who are able to work has remained steady, at 70%, despite the economic downturn.

· The percentage of absconders (parolees who stop reporting) has declined from 7% in 2002 to 3% in August 2009.

2. Tailor Conditions of Supervision

Parole interventions and conditions of parole should target dynamic –

changing - factors that are the biggest contributors to criminal behavior. The Board uses a risk and needs assessment to identify those contributors in order to establish conditions of parole. These conditions become part of the overall reentry plan for case management purposes. The field agent may add or modify conditions as the offender adjusts to life outside of prison.

3. Focus Resources on Higher Risk Offenders

According to the risk principle, offenders should be targeted with supervision and treatment interventions that are commensurate with their risk of re-offending. Low risk offenders should not be treated like high-risk offenders – an intervention may

increase the failure rate for low risk offenders. The Board follows this principle by targeting interventions to mid to high risk offenders in order to maximize the effectiveness of the agent's time and resources.

4. Frontload Supervision Resources

The first year on parole is critical to an offender's success. The Board created transitional coordinator positions to provide intensive case support to mid to high risk offenders, up to six months, when parolees are most likely to recidivate.

The TC becomes involved with the offender prior to release from the institution to ensure continuity of care and treatment, and provide employment and housing assistance.

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Once the offender is stable in the community, the parolee is assigned to a general supervision caseload.

5. Implement Earned Discharge

The Parole Act does not allow the Board to discharge offenders from parole prior to the completion of their sentence. However, Act 81 of 2008 established the Recidivism Risk Reduction Incentive (RRRI) which allows inmates who comply with all of the criteria to earn credit to be paroled at an earlier minimum date, but this does not change the sentence length imposed by the court.

The RRRI provides an incentive for inmates to participate in prison programming and treatment and to behave while in prison, all toward the goal of changing behavior. If an inmate receives RRRI certification from the DOC – meaning they have met the criteria as set in law - they are seen by the Board at the earlier minimum sentence date.

6. Supervise Offenders in their Community

State parole agents perform most of their work in the community; they are not office based. Generally, 3 out of 4 workdays are spent in the field making contacts with the parolee, the parolee's family, friends and employer. In this manner, they get to know their neighborhoods, build relationships and learn about valuable resources available to help the offender transition to a law-abiding lifestyle. The agent spends

at least one day in the office to complete paperwork for supervision, parole hearings or pre-sentence investigative reports.

7. Engage Partners to Expand Intervention Capacity

The key to success in the community is collaboration with external and internal stakeholders. Offenders, while incarcerated for many years, have been separated from economic, career, prosocial, and psychological supports.

As a partner in community corrections, the Board seeks partnerships with community and faith based organizations, works with state and county agencies to ensure continuity of mental health care, connects with providers prior to release to set appointments for inmates once they are released into the community, and meets with criminal justice advisory boards to share the message that state parole needs and wants to work with local partners to address the needs of returning offenders.

8. Assess Criminal Risk and Need Factors

The Board uses reliable and validated risk and needs assessment instruments. The LSI-R (Level of Service Inventory – Revised) is a quantitative survey of 54 attributes of offenders. This assessment helps predict parole outcomes, success in correctional halfway houses, and institutional misconducts and recidivism.

The LSI-R is incorporated in the Parole Decisional Instrument, which is used as a guide for the

decision maker. The Parole Decisional Instrument is research-based and validated on Pennsylvania's population and includes many other factors in addition to the results of risk and needs assessments. Included are assessments from the Department of Corrections to assess criminal thinking, anger and hostility, mental health, psychological, and substance abuse issues. These assessments analyze changes in outcomes that demonstrate a reduced risk of re-offending which is a key contributor to the parole decisional process.

The results of the LSI-R establish the level of supervision and identify the offender's needs for the development of a supervision plan. The LSI-R also is used when the offender is on supervision to regularly re-evaluate the risk and needs as his or her situation changes.

9. Balance Surveillance and Treatment in Case Plans

Supervision by itself does not reduce recidivism; effective interventions are needed along with monitoring and control.

The Board's case plans balance surveillance and treatment. The Board provides cognitive behavioral programming, works in collaboration with local drug and alcohol and mental health providers, and assists offenders with employment through career link and employment classes. Curfews and electronic monitoring may be used along with treatment and counseling.

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10. Involve Offenders in the Supervision Process

The offender is engaged in the process of change and interventions are targeted appropriately to identified risk and needs. While still in prison, the offender works with the institutional parole agent to complete the Re-Entry and Transition Accountability Checklist. Indicators noted are the type of identification an offender has, i.e. birth certificate, Social Security card, drivers license; risk assessment scores; programs completed and recommended; social services applied for; follow up appointments; and a family or other support system.

11. Engage Informal Social Controls

Relationships with family, friends and neighbors and employers are

effective in promoting positive behavior changes. The Board conducts family education and support meetings prior to an offender's release. Contacts with these individuals – collateral contacts - are required under the Board's supervision procedures.

12. Use Incentives and Rewards

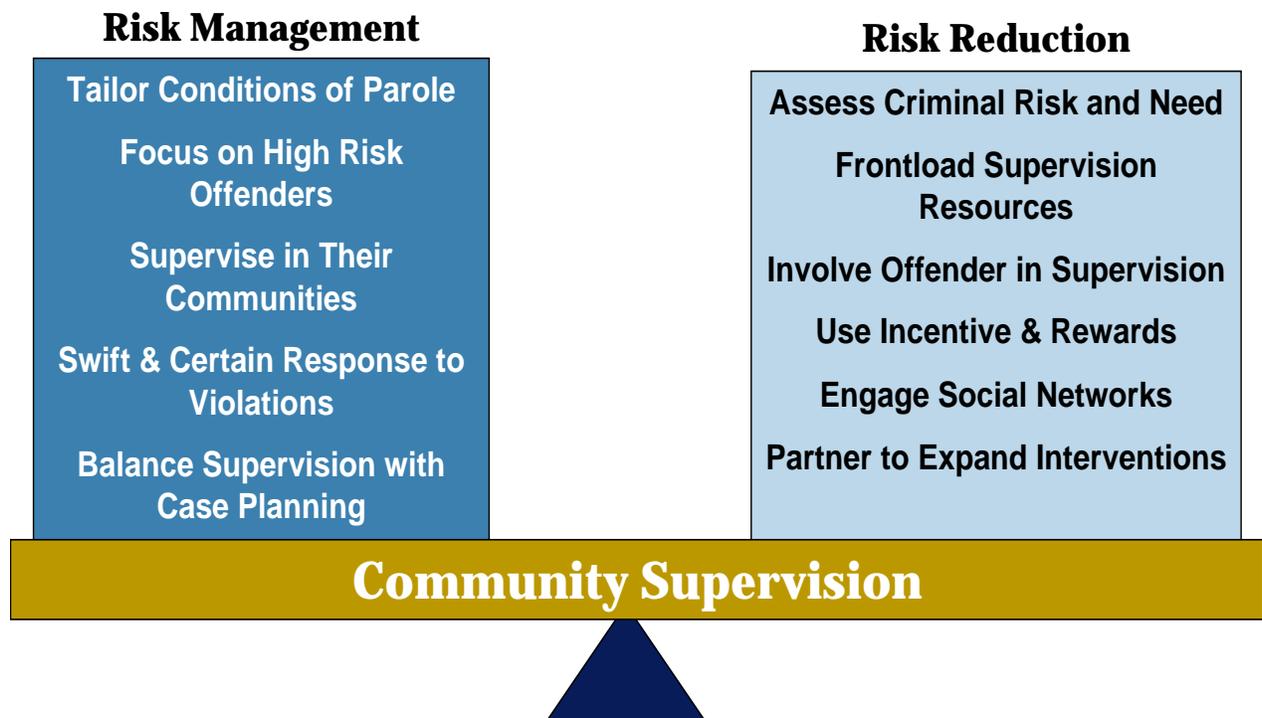
Research shows that a 4:1 ratio of rewards to punishment is optimal for promoting behavioral change. The Board accomplishes this as a result of using Motivational Interviewing techniques.

Affirmations and rewards are built into motivational interviewing. Agents are encouraged to use affirmations – something as simple as saying thanks to the offender for showing up for an appointment. This type of relationship builds the therapeutic relationship that is needed to foster change

Eligible offenders can be placed on administrative parole one year after release on parole supervision if they qualify. Administrative parole has reduced reporting requirements for offenders who have been complying with their conditions of parole and there is no indication they are a danger to public safety.

13. Respond to Violations with Swift and Certain Sanctions

The Board sets conditions of parole and monitors them to encourage success, which results ultimately in less victimization. The Board's Violation Sanctioning Grid conforms to evidence based practices and is used by all field parole agents to apply graduated sanctions based on the severity of the violation. Five sanctions, on average, are imposed prior to revocation.



Offering Victims More of a Voice

The physical pain, anguish and fear experienced by a victim of crime can often last a lifetime.

Incarceration of the offender can provide some relief; however, the anticipated release of the offender often releases a flood of memories and fears.

“Safety for our victims is always an issue, for some it is a much higher priority -- Victim Wrap Around is a tool we use to ensure continuing safety for those special cases,” said Lavery.

In Pennsylvania, victims have the right to provide input regarding parole and conditions of parole to the Board for consideration during the parole interview through the Pennsylvania Crime Victims Act and victims Bill of Rights. Granting victims a voice once the offender was on parole supervision was not always a possibility.

During the spring of 2008, the Victim Wrap Around Program was developed. The program allows the victim to determine if he or she wants communication with the parole agent as they supervise the parolee. As many agents are quick to indicate, victims often have knowledge on the history, habits, and behavior of the offender typically unavailable to them.

“This program enables us to strengthen the connection with parole agents and victims” stated Board Member Jim Fox, who initiated the program. “Board Members continually receive a great deal of valuable information



from the victim to assist with their parole decision. We realized agents could benefit from direct contact with victims as well.”

According to Carol Lavery, Victim Advocate, victims under the Wrap Around are safer and more protected. Given increased communication, agents are better able to identify those “red-flags” which indicate negative parolee behavior.

“Safety for our victims is always an issue, for some it is a much higher priority -- Victim Wrap Around is a tool we use to ensure continuing safety for those special cases,” said Lavery.

The increased communication not only protects the victim from “further victimization,” cited Fox, but also allows agents to use the victim’s point of view to better understand the offender’s behavior.

The program can work a few different ways. A Board Member may read compelling information in the victim’s statement and recommend the case for Victim Wrap Around. In some instances there may not be input from a registered victim but, given the circumstances of the case, the Board Member may determine potential safety concerns.

Or a registered victim may contact OVA and request to be a part of the program.

Examples of Wrap Around Cases

The victim of a robbery, who was retaliated against when he reported the crime to police, requested to talk to the parole agent to share his concerns, including the letter he provided for the parole interview. The agent gained additional information to better understand the nature of the crime and the devastating impact on the victim. As a result, the victim’s knowledge influenced the parolee’s supervision.

A domestic violence survivor with a current Protection from Abuse Order against an offender requested the Wrap Around services. To accommodate the victims work and school schedule, the agent met the victim on a Friday evening at her home.

After discussing her concerns, the victim agreed to have regular contact with the agent, the agent provided emergency contact phone numbers, the agent double checked with local police to make sure they were aware of the PFA, and as part of his conditions of parole the offender was prohibited from any contact with the victim and from entering the county where the victim lived without permission from his parole agent.

In all cases, the OVA is the initial contact with the victim to determine if he or she would like to share any

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Offering Victims More of a Voice

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information with the parole agent to address safety concerns.

Cases typically designated for Wrap Around are those characterized by domestic violence, sexual assault, or any case where the victim is known to the offender. "There is no magic formula in determining the designation" stated Victoria Sostack, Director of Victim Services. "The Board certainly has discretion, but they will consider those cases where the impact to the victim would be compelling."

Due to confidentiality laws, victims do not have access to records from

the parolee's file or treatment information; however, the victim may be notified of the status of the parolee and if the offender stops reporting to his agent.

As Lavery indicates, "Anytime you increase communication between the victim and the agent, the more likely we are able to create a safe situation for the entire community."

The Victim Wrap Around program is only the latest service supported through the Office of Victim Advocate - an independent agency housed within the Board of Probation and Parole.

Under the Commonwealth's Crime Victims Act, the OVA ensures that all victims' rights are honored throughout the criminal justice process. Specifically relating to incarceration and parole, OVA notifies registered crime victims of any changes in an offender's incarceration status and of an upcoming parole interview.

If you have questions about the Victim Wrap Around program, or any services provided by the Office of the Victim Advocate, please call 1-800-536-6399.

Probation, Parole and Community Supervision Week

This past July the agency celebrated Probation, Parole and Community Supervision Week in recognition of the valuable work that parole agents and staff provide to the community every day.

Read on to see how some of the parole districts observed this week:

In the Northwest Division of Philadelphia, Deputy District Director Michelle Rivera provided a pizza luncheon to her staff in conjunction with a staff meeting. At this meeting Supervisors Debrest and Supervisor Kemper were congratulated on their perfect audit scores.

The Allentown District, under the leadership of District Director Joe Smith,

organized a pot-luck picnic for the staff and family members at a local park.

District Director Lori Reehorst of Altoona hosted a luncheon and provided her staff with an insulated, engraved travel mug with the Board logo:

ALTOONA DISTRICT
OFFICE

Demanding Job - Professional
Attitude
We Make a Difference
Everyday

The Harrisburg District Office held a combined staff meeting and luncheon at the American Legion in Lebanon, where Supervisor Kris Bingham's dad is president. Through previous community service work for the Legion, parolees provided landscaping services and lined the baseball field.

Central Office personnel were provided a picnic lunch of hot dogs and hamburgers served by Board Members and senior staff. After the meal, a little friendly competition was in order as teams played the first ever Parole Jeopardy. Team Legal was the champ.

Across western Pennsylvania, the parole offices in each of the four districts - Altoona, Erie, Mercer and Pittsburgh - held a luncheon celebration to recognize staff for their hard work and dedication.

Thanks to everyone for their part in making Probation, Parole and Community Supervision Week a success!

Safety on the Streets through Law Enforcement Partnerships

From Erie to Philadelphia, state parole agents work in partnership with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to help keep our communities safer. These working relationships range from investigating a residence where an offender has requested to live, and serving on multi-jurisdictional task force operations to apprehending fugitives and attending police roll calls.

As peace officers, parole agents have the power and authority to arrest without warrant any parolee or special probationer under their supervision for violating the terms and conditions of parole or probation. They also have the authority to search the parolee and his or her property if they have reasonable suspicion.

Here are some examples of how parole agents work with law enforcement agencies:

Operation Pressure Point

In April, the Philadelphia Police Department launched a new crime fighting initiative to target high crime areas in the city on selected Friday and Saturday nights. The police viewed the participation of the Board as vital to Operation Pressure Point. At their request, the Board has been involved from the beginning, along with sixteen other local, state and federal agencies.

According to Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey, during 2008, sixty-four percent (64%) of homicides occurred from April through October. Of those

homicides, fifty percent (50%) occurred on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

“It’s designed to identify and target the most violent areas of our city. And we’re going to do that by increasing the number of personnel in targeted zones. We’re going to identify and pursue all active bench, state, probation, parole and fugitive warrants. We’ll be



identifying and pursuing juveniles wanted on warrants, ensuring code compliance by commercial bars and those establishments with a history

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It’s Never Too Late to Change: One Parolee’s Story

Charlie Smith* is a 60 year old parolee who spent 16 years in prison for robbery. Before being paroled in 2005, he had no family, job or home waiting for him. While on parole, he slowly started to rebuild his life with the help of his agent, Nate Simon.

Smith credits Simon with helping him to readjust to life outside of prison. “Charlie often talked to me about how difficult it was to not rush and get frustrated with how slowly responsible change comes about in life,” said Simon.

As part of those responsible changes, Smith completed the half-way-back program at Alle Kiski to address his substance abuse issues, followed by the VA Domicillary program for homeless vets. After living in Vets Place he transitioned to his own residence. Smith has maintained sobriety, leads Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholic Anonymous meetings, is an active member of his church, works for the federal government and has gotten married.

In May 2009, Smith received an Excellence in Government Award. Agent Simon was not surprised. “Charlie always maintained an exceptionally positive attitude and high level of compliance and cooperation with the Board.”

The award is designed to recognize Federal employees whose service has demonstrated a deep personal and professional commitment to excellence. “Just to be nominated is a very humbling situation and I truly thank God for all the blessings and people such as [Agent Simon] who have helped me along the way,” Smith stated.

**The name is fictitious, but the events are real.*

Safety on the Streets through Law Enforcement Partnerships

of nuisance,” Ramsey said in April when he announced the program.

“I am pleased we have participated in this effort to stem the flow of violence in the city,” said Philadelphia District Director Dennis Powell. “Working with other law enforcement agencies is an important part of the work we do to protect the safety of the public.”

The weekend of October 9, Board Member Jeffrey Imboden participated in the operation. Several fugitives were arrested on drug, aggravated assault and murder charges.

“I was pleased to observe the cooperative and professional effort by the joint task force resulting in the arrest of two parole fugitives that night,” Imboden said. “I’m proud of our agents and grateful to the Philadelphia Police Department, the U. S. Marshals Service and the entire team for their dedication, commitment, respect, and courage.”

FAST Participation with US Marshals Continuing to Yield Results

Parole agents are part of the U.S. Marshals Service Fugitive Task Force in each region of the state.

Recently, Pittsburgh FAST (Fugitive Apprehension and Search Team) Agent J. McAleer had been tracking a convicted sex offender who stopped receiving sex offender treatment and stopped reporting to his agent. The parolee was apprehended in Maryland when the U.S. Marshals learned of his

potential involvement with a teenager.

On Sept. 24, the Harrisburg FAST Unit, as part of the U.S. Marshals Fugitive Task Force, apprehended four parole absconders who were convicted of possessing and selling illegal drugs, receiving stolen property and forgery.

One of those absconders was on Interstate Probation for domestic violence, stalking, and harassment and he was returned to South Carolina. A fifth absconder turned himself in a few days later after repeated attempts by agents to locate him.

Drug Money and Cocaine Removed from Streets

State parole agents in the Harrisburg District Office received a tip about a parolee who was not reporting for supervision. The information identified the hotel where the parolee was staying and the type of car he was thought to be driving. For three hours, two parole agents staked out the hotel lobby and waited for the parolee. When he eventually showed up, the



agents followed him and observed him open a safety deposit box. Moving quickly, they apprehended him and discovered \$33,000 in the box – drug money. The vehicle identified through the tip was in the adjacent parking lot. Nine ounces of cocaine were seized. The money and drugs were turned over to the city police and the parolee was put behind bars.

Worn Out Sneakers and an Observant Parole Agent Solve Burglary Crimes



After a highly-publicized rash of 18 burglaries occurred in seven different communities in Luzerne County, local officials formed a task force to solve these crimes.

Police had few clues to act on. In each burglary, the suspect wore a cover over his face and there were no physical identifying characteristics. A list of possible suspects was created, but police had little to go on. When a state parole agent stopped in to view the store’s surveillance tapes, everything changed.

The only identifying item was the man’s clothing – his sneakers in particular. The parole agent got a close-up look at the sneakers -- extremely worn -- and then reviewed the list of suspects. One

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Fugitive Safe Surrender

The atmosphere was heavy as an anxious crowd pushed through the entrance of the Zion Assembly of Harrisburg Church. Inside, an attorney raced down a narrow hallway, plain clothes officers stood patiently on guard, and the sound of a copy machine and smooth jazz could be heard in the distance.

Wires were strewn across hallways and portable air conditioners worked overtime to cool the crowd. The interior of the Zion church was transformed to reflect a fully functioning judicial system at work processing hundreds of incoming fugitives.

“This is exciting,” said Public Defender Ken Rapp as he stepped over a cable taped to the floor. “We’ve managed to move the entire Dauphin County Courthouse into this little church.”

From June 10 through the 13, Dauphin County became the 14th location nationwide to host Fugitive Safe Surrender, an initiative of the U.S. Marshals Service that provides a safe setting for individuals with non-violent felony and misdemeanor warrants to turn themselves in to law enforcement, consult with a lawyer and speak to a judge in a faith-based setting. Those who cooperate and peacefully surrender are granted favorable consideration in subsequent proceedings and sentencing.

“I’ve been working for twenty-years and you just don’t see things like this. It really is a testament to the community, officers, and government who supported it,” said

Philip Cornelious, Deputy U.S. Marshal. “It is important to understand what Safe Surrender provides to the community . . . it reduces the risk to law enforcement officers pursuing warrants and the potential danger to the public who, unfortunately, are sometimes caught in between.”



Faith-based organizations, over 200 courteous and friendly volunteers, community-based resources such as Career Link, Crisis Intervention and Firm Foundation of Pennsylvania, and counseling services worked along side U.S. Marshals, the courts, district attorney’s office, public defender’s office, county adult probation and parole, several local police departments and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole.

The Board of Probation and Parole had seven staff members from the Harrisburg District Office participate in the four-day event – to set up the temporary parole office with computers and necessary paperwork along with agents on site ready to process and transport offenders.

Prior to the event, the Board sent letters to the last known address of parolees who had stopped reporting to their agent. This included addresses of friends, family members or others who may have had contact with the parolee.

Parole agents from the Harrisburg District Office posted the U.S. Marshals’ flyer about the event in public locations throughout Dauphin County.

The Board sees Fugitive Safe Surrender as a smart public safety strategy that encourages offenders to own up to their responsibilities and to be held accountable.

“I’ve been working for twenty- years and you just don’t see things like this. It really is a testament to the community, officers, and government who supported it,” said Philip Cornelious, Deputy U.S. Marshal.

“On the surface, it may seem we are catering to criminals or creating an amnesty program” said Lisa Moser, Harrisburg District Director for the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole, “but that is not the case, we are taking fugitives off the street in a safe and respectful manner.”

Among the most notable successes for the Board was the case of an absconder who was sentenced for burglary and attempting to elude a police officer who was paroled from SCI-Coal Township in April 2007.

The offender, aged 25, stopped reporting to the community corrections center just three months later after refusing to participate in a mandatory out-patient treatment

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Fugitive Safe Surrender

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program. After more than two years of running from the police and living under a false name in Florida, he and his mother walked into Zion church where he turned himself in.

“We sent a letter to his mother and she persuaded him to turn himself in” said Moser. “He just wanted to get the warrant off his shoulders, put the event behind him, and focus on supporting his kids - - Safe Surrender provided that opportunity.”

The parolee stated that “it was time for him to be a man, accept responsibility for his actions and to stop hurting his family.” He had not seen his mother or his children for two years while he was on the run.

When asked about his future, the parolee said “I am going to do whatever it takes to do parole right the next time around.” After he and his mother were informed of the parole violation process, the offender finished off the bowl of Reese’s peanut butter cups on Moser’s desk, hugged and kissed his mother and walked around the corner where he was arrested in a private location.

In total, six state parole absconders turned themselves in and 30 active offenders turned themselves in for warrants from other agencies – traffic tickets, disorderly conduct or child support - placed on them prior to parole. Over the four-day event, more than 1,250 non-parole fugitives turned themselves in and over 5,795 warrants were addressed. Those fugitives who surrendered traveled from regions including, Canada, Dominican Republic, and North Carolina.

Fugitive Safe Surrender - Harrisburg was launched under the leadership of Michael Regan, United States Marshal for the Middle District of Pennsylvania. Coordinating with local officials, government, corporate and non-profit organizations required more than a year of planning.

Recognition from the City of Harrisburg

The efforts of Agent Ebony Anderson in the Harrisburg District Office resulted in a letter of recognition and *Award in Public Beautification* to the Board by Mayor Reed.

Anderson has organized community service work for parolees to help clean up leaves and trash from the streets of Harrisburg, assist with food distribution at the food bank,

remove large items and unneeded clothing from a local church, and clean, paint and install certain items.

Through community service work, parolees give back to the community and enhance their skills to become job ready.

Congratulations to Agent Anderson for her excellent work and for representing the Board well.

Key Board Contacts

For specific inmate inquiries from attorneys, family members, friends and the general public, please call the Inmate Inquiry Unit at:

717.772.4343

For inquiries from elected officials, the media and other government agencies, please call the Board’s Office of Policy, Legislative Affairs and Communications at:

717.787.6208

Sneakers...

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of the suspects on the list was a parolee who lost his job around the time the burglaries began.

A short while later the agent went to the parolee’s home and the parolee answered the door wearing the same sneakers that were caught on tape. After a short conversation, the parolee was taken into custody where he confessed to the 18 burglaries and the major crime spree came to an end.