



CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

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I'm Ann Leymon, Criminologist with the CJC. I do not have firsthand experience with this program but I have spent several hours investigating it and speaking with Susan Leavell, the program's creator and administrator. Because of this I am confident I can accurately convey the basic structure, outcomes, and costs of the program as it exists in Washington.

Washington has two programs under the umbrella of Parenting Sentencing Alternatives that have been operating since 2010. In practice they are run almost identically, but they have two different ways offenders get into the program and they have slightly different criteria to match the different ways they get in the programs. Both programs allow the offender to remain in the community under intensive supervision, parenting their children and receiving services designed both to reduce offending and to improve parenting skills. The guiding principle is always the best interests of the child or children.

The first program captures offenders at the front end of the criminal justice system, when judges are making sentencing decisions, and is called the Family and Offender Sentencing Alternative (FOSA). This program allows offenders potentially facing a sentence of more than a year of prison, to instead serve one year under intensive probation. The second program, called the Community Parenting Alternative (CPA), captures offenders at the back end of the criminal justice system – it allows parents to spend the last year of their sentence in the community. Because in this program participants are still technically inmates, they also are on electronic monitoring.

To qualify for FOSA, the offender must have been a custodial parent at the time the crime was committed. The offender cannot have felony violent or sex offense in their criminal history. They have to sign a release form that enables DSHS to share information with DOC regarding the offender's history, and initiates a thorough screening process that includes detailed assessments and a home visit. CPA has an additional layer of screening: an interdisciplinary committee that meets monthly to evaluate cases that pass the initial criteria. This committee looks thoroughly at the offender's history during incarceration: behavior, including any infractions; services received; and visitation schedule with the children. The committee also considers where the offender will live. About 2/3rds of cases in the CPA program will live with a family member or in clean and sober housing; in these cases, whomever they live with is their sponsor, and the sponsor must agree to allow the CCO to search their property for the time period the offender is

living with them and in the program. This is to ensure that the offender doesn't have access to drugs, alcohol, or firearms.

Once in the program, offenders get a high level of services as well as accountability. In the beginning they have daily phone contact with CCOs and meet with their CCO weekly (during which they take a UA). Those in CPA must also provide schedules accounting for their time on an hour by hour basis. Their time is spent getting services (mostly substance use treatment, parenting classes, and mental health treatment, but a wide range of services might be accessed in service to the overall goal, which is not just about reducing recidivism, but also improving parenting) and with their kids, having family dinners, reading or helping with homework, and so forth.

Another unique feature of this program is that offenders can be revoked or terminated not just for committing a new crime or violating conditions of probation – they can be revoked or terminated from the program for not making progress. Again, this program centers on the best interests of the child or children, and the offender has been given the chance to parent while serving their sentence in the community. If they're not taking it seriously, spending time with their child and attending treatment and programming, the judge can revoke or terminate the offender from the program.

This program is more expensive than basic probation, due to the services offered and the high level of individual attention from the caseworker. In Washington, the caseloads have an upper limit of 15. There were some upfront costs in establishing the program, as well as educating key players in the criminal justice system such as judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys about how it works so that it gets used. There were costs to training POs, which was done by DSHS; this program approaches probation in a different style than is typical, focusing on the whole family rather than just the offender. There is a cost to the collaboration: establishing agreements, coordinating on cases, and doing casework together. There is a cost to the thorough screening process, which is crucial to maintaining the focus on serving the best interests of the child or children.

As of February 2015, 275 out of 359 past participants (76.6%) in both programs combined successfully completed. 22/275 (8%) re-offended with a new felony, and 16/275 (5.8%) returned to prison. Additionally, in the first 18 months, 44 children were diverted from foster care and 8 were returned to parents early. By improving parenting and working on lifestyle factors that lead to criminal behavior, this program likely has intergenerational effects reducing crime.