

► *Educate and Involve the Public as a Means of Reducing Barriers Common to Sex Offender Reentry*

In the past, sex offending was considered to be a problem of and the responsibility of the criminal and juvenile justice systems, and community members were absent from attempts to respond to the problem. Recently, however, it has been suggested that sex offending may be most appropriately described as a community issue and viewed as a public health problem (see, e.g., Berlin, 2000; Laws, 2003; McMahon & Puett, 1999). When considered in this fashion, sex offending expands into a broader societal concern that requires active involvement from, and the attention of, the public.

THROUGH THEIR ABILITY TO INFORM, GUIDE, AND INFLUENCE COMMUNITY LEADERS AND POLICYMAKERS, AN EDUCATED PUBLIC CAN HAVE A PROFOUND IMPACT ON EFFECTIVE SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT.

In order to encourage public involvement in these issues, the key stakeholders who are involved in the transition and community reintegration process must take active steps to dispel myths about sex offenders and educate the public about the nature of sexual victimization, who is most likely to be targeted and by whom, and how effective reentry strategies can increase community safety and prevent further victimization. Educating and partnering with the public increases community capacity in new and important ways. Through their ability to inform, guide, and influence community leaders and policymakers, an educated public can have a profound impact on effective sex offender management (CSOM, 2000b). Moreover, from a public health perspective, an educated public can expand traditional offender management

efforts through a focus on primary prevention in the community. Ideally, multidisciplinary reentry initiatives go beyond the use of community meetings as a means of public education and dedicate resources to developing educational materials that can be accessed through a variety of venues (e.g., Web sites, public service announcements, newspapers, television) and by a wide audience.

At present, a variety of indicators suggest growing public support for a more balanced emphasis on rehabilitation and punishment, alternatives to mandatory sentences, intermediate sanctions, and reentry initiatives (see, e.g., Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2002; Petersilia, 2003). Therefore, professionals involved in sex offender reentry should take advantage of this climate and take active steps toward educating the public and eliciting their support and involvement (CSOM, 2000a; Schlank & Bidelman, 2001; Zevitz & Farkas, 2000a).

► **Questions**

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217. always/
yes typically generally
not never/
no Are efforts made to educate communities about adult and juvenile sex offenders and their management, as well as the victims of these crimes?

If so, describe the nature of the efforts and the individuals/disciplines involved:

218. always/
yes typically generally
not never/
no Are community leaders, organizations, and other community members involved in the development of reentry strategies for sex offenders?

If so, describe the nature of the efforts and the individuals/organizations involved:
