

COMMUNITY RESOURCE VIDEOCONFERENCE

COMMUNITY RESOURCE VIDEOCONFERENCE is a group level intervention that aims to help inmates, on a voluntary basis, develop a discharge plan as they near their release from federal prison. The key characteristics of the Community Resource Videoconference are: the motivation it provides for inmates to begin to think about, and plan for, post-release life; the opportunity for inmates to interact with community service providers “in real time”; and the time allotted after the videoconference for follow up questions and assessment with the facility case managers.

CURRENT ACTIVITY SETTING

Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, General Program

Directly links the client to medical care

- ✓ Gets the client in a conversation about starting medical care
- ✓ Brings the agency closer to where HIV+ people are so that the conversation can begin

I. DESCRIPTION

OBJECTIVES

- ▶▶ To help individuals make a successful, post-release transition
- ▶▶ To provide inmates, prior to their release, with information from resource and health service providers in the community to which they will return

POPULATION SERVED

- ▶▶ Individuals who will be released from federal prison within six months and will be returning to a designated community under court supervision.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

In Community Resource Videoconference, the correctional facility and court supervision agency are able to support a comprehensive discharge plan for soon-to-be-released individuals housed in a remote correctional facility by connecting them with resources in the communities where they will live.



QUICK NOTES:

“Inmates tell me, ‘this is what I’ve asked for from the beginning . . . if I only had this earlier, I wouldn’t be back [in prison].’”

— DEPARTMENT SUPERVISOR

- ▶▶ The court supervision agency and correctional facility warden set a date for the videoconference.
- ▶▶ The agency invites community resource providers, including providers of HIV related services, to the videoconference as presenters. The presenters are asked to provide descriptions of their resources and services as well as “bureaucratic issues” relevant to recently released individuals (e.g., obtaining identification, and filling out forms and paperwork to secure needed benefits and services).
- ▶▶ The agency next develops an agenda for the full-day videoconference, allotting time for introductions, community resource presentations (30 to 45 minutes), an orientation to community supervision, and a question and answer period.
- ▶▶ The correctional facility screens and selects 200 inmates who have voluntarily signed up to participate. Participants must expect release from the correctional facility within six months, and their release status is verified by the facility.
- ▶▶ One week before the videoconference, each participating inmate receives a packet of materials from the court supervision agency. Materials include the videoconference agenda and information on the presenters and their organizations.
- ▶▶ The facility provides a large common room with seating for each of the participating inmates.
- ▶▶ The agency provides videoconferencing equipment (screens, audio devices, etc.) to the correctional facility. An IT specialist sets up videoconference equipment in a room at the facility.
- ▶▶ Another IT specialist sets up videoconference equipment at the agency, where the presenters will be located.
- ▶▶ The day of the videoconference, participating community agencies gather in a room at the court supervision agency. Facility staff, including the warden, case managers, and moderator, gathers in a room at the correctional facility. Inmates are escorted to the room.
- ▶▶ The videoconference begins with introductions. General supervision officers then give an orientation to supervision. A question and answer session follows, facilitated by a moderator at both ends. Throughout the day, agency re-entry officers are on-hand in the room to continue answering any questions on post-release supervision.
- ▶▶ A representative from each community resource agency speaks for 30-45 minutes on agency services. Q & A sessions follow each presentation. Any questions left unanswered during this session are taken down with the inmate’s name. A response is promised either as soon as possible or during a follow-up videoconference (depending on the urgency of the requested information).
- ▶▶ Following the community presentations, there is a break for lunch.
- ▶▶ Lunch is followed by presentations from the remaining agencies.
- ▶▶ The moderator concludes the event, referring the inmates to the information in the packets they received.
- ▶▶ The facility case managers provide the inmates with additional information and application forms for identified health and social services.
- ▶▶ The warden shuts down the television set, and the inmates are escorted back to their housing units.

Follow-Up

- ▶▶ One month later, the follow-up videoconference takes place, which is a half day event. Selected presenters are asked to return and answer questions, speaking first to the group and then one-on-one with inmates who have questions needing confidentiality.
- ▶▶ Inmate attendance is voluntary.
- ▶▶ Again, IT specialists positioned at each end of the videoconference manage the equipment. Agency case managers attend to provide application forms and brochures for services that were not identified during the initial videoconference.

PROMOTION OF ACTIVITY

- ▶▶ Service organizations receive reminders of videoconference dates by e-mail.
- ▶▶ Inmates learn of the event from their case managers, the warden, and by word of mouth from other inmates.

II. LOGISTICS

STAFF REQUIRED

Agency Site

- ▶ Co-moderator to open the videoconference, introduce the presenters, and provide concluding remarks
- ▶ Agency court supervision officers to detail post-release supervision requirements and expectations
- ▶ Agency case managers to provide service information and forms and to answer inmate questions
- ▶ IT specialist to set up videoconferencing equipment
- ▶ Community resource representatives to outline services and resources available in the designated community

Correctional Facility Site

- ▶ Co-moderator to open the videoconference and provide concluding remarks
- ▶ IT specialist to set up audio-visual equipment
- ▶ Facility representative (usually the warden) to promote Community Resource Videoconference events within the inmate population and to officiate at each event
- ▶ Facility case managers to record and answer questions
- ▶ Unit managers and corrections officers to escort participating inmates to and from the videoconference site
- ▶ Facility staff to assist in scheduling the room and setting up seating for videoconference

TRAINING & SKILLS

The agency does not require special training or skills for this activity.

PLACE OF ACTIVITY

Two videoconference-capable rooms: one at the agency and the other at the correctional facility.

FREQUENCY OF ACTIVITY

The initial video conference, lasting seven hours, takes place four times a year. In each instance, a follow-up videoconference of four to five hours takes place one month later.

OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS

None

SUPPORT SERVICES

None

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ▶ The agency's public affairs office and the correctional facility warden must commit a considerable amount of time to planning the activity.
- ▶ The agency must generate support from provider organizations in the designated community and secure speakers to present on services available.
- ▶ Service organizations must commit to serving inmates before and after their release.

III. STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES

STRENGTHS

- ▶ Inmates receive general information on critical health and social services, often for the first time. The information provides them with a “road map” to successful reunification with their families and the possibility of “crime-free lives” through accessing appropriate resources and services.
- ▶ After a videoconference, inmates bring questions to their case managers within the facility and begin to ask questions about life after discharge. Many inmates begin to assess their service needs, which facilitates a smooth transition.

WEAKNESSES

- ▶ The limited number of participating facilities
- ▶ There is no individual follow-up with inmates after their release to make sure they are able to link to the services highlighted in videoconference.

DIFFICULTIES FOR CLIENTS

- ▶ The information from providers might be difficult for some inmates to comprehend and therefore act on.
- ▶ Inmates are unable to enroll in services at the time of the videoconference.
- ▶ Inmates may experience frustration navigating bureaucracies in order to access care.
- ▶ Since there could be as many as six months between the activity and a release date, there is a risk that an inmate will forget the information by the time they return home.
- ▶ The agency does not have funding for individual follow-up to make sure linkages to care and services are made.

DIFFICULTIES FOR STAFF

This activity is labor-intensive for all staff members involved and goes beyond the purview of their established job duties.

OBSTACLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Due to community mistrust of individuals with criminal justice involvement, the larger social service system tends to direct its outreach efforts toward individuals who are perceived to be at “lower risk” for re-incarceration.

ACTIVITY NOT SUITED FOR

N/A

IV. OUTCOMES

EVALUATION

- ▶ The agency tracks the recidivism of individuals receiving community supervision. The staff reviews this tracking data to determine the difference in recidivism between activity participants and non-participants.
- ▶ The agency also maintains records on attendance at videoconferences and participant overflow.
- ▶ The agency staff documents questions and concerns raised by inmates during the videoconference.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- ▶ All Community Resource Videoconference events are filled to capacity, even with minimal promotion, with active participation from attending inmates.
- ▶ Questions asked to service providers and facility case managers show active participation and genuine interest from the inmate population.
- ▶ Returning inmates report that they would not be back in prison if this activity had been available to them at an earlier time.
- ▶ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the activity supports a significant improvement in the inmate-discharge process.

UNANTICIPATED BENEFITS

- ▶ This activity has benefited children by helping their incarcerated parents think about their post-release life, which increases their chances of a successful transition back into the community.
- ▶ The agency gains increased awareness of other organizations that serve the same community.

“CONNECTING TO CARE” ELEMENTS OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ The human connection: Participants receive introductions to individuals who may be the same people who eventually provide them with HIV, health, and social services.
- ▶ The community providers show a compassion for the HIV+ clients which isn't always demonstrated by community supervision.

KEEP IN MIND...

- ▶ The activity requires much coordination; start on a modest scale and build it up gradually.
- ▶ If a correctional facility lacks IT infrastructure (equipment and staff to conduct videoconferencing), information packets on community resources can still be offered to inmates who are nearing discharge.
- ▶ New technological developments (involving Web-based videoconferencing) may eliminate technological barriers, reduce costs, and ease staff efforts.
- ▶ Discharged inmates are more likely to stay “on the right track” with appropriate support, but they need to know which community services they can access.

