

Community of Practice of the Prison and Probation Social Services of Catalonia Meet The Catalan Penitentiary Social Services

General Directorate of Prison Affairs
Secretariat of Criminal Sanctions,
Rehabilitation and Victim Support
Department of Justice, Rights and Memory
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TREBALL SOCIAL PENITENCIARI



The Compartim Program. Prison and Probation Social Workers' Community of Practice

The Compartim Program¹ is an initiative of the Department of Justice, Rights and Memory, designed through the Centre for Legal Studies and Specialized Training. This program aims to create collaborative work environments, bringing people together to achieve better practices and deal with challenges co-operatively.

These improvements become possible through innovative contributions and expertise exchange, enabling constructive discussion, and creating a space that facilitates joint reflexions upon diverse experiences.

Therefore, within this new environment we also learn through practice, using the knowledge and experiences of colleagues in a range of situations. Through this interaction, practitioners, altogether with organizations, convert individual knowledge into collective intelligence, and thus collaboratively build the knowledge of the organization.

The *Compartim Program* is built with different professional groups, whom are willing to improve aspects of their work practice. Proposals for participation can come from any area of the organization: it is only required to work with the group to achieve the objectives planned and joint efforts to contribute to this aim.

Therefore, each professional group must select a professional aspect they want to improve, in order to develop the Community of Practice (CoP).

In this regard, Social workers of the penitentiary and probation Social Services were the first group to promote a CoP in 2006. At that time, social workers decided to improve social reports, working on the content according to the objective of each type of report.

On 2024, after many years developing these initiatives, the CoP of penitentiary and probation social workers has produced a video to present their practise and implications of their work at different levels: with individuals in custody and probation, their families, and the wider society. This video seeks to illustrate the core values of the social services in the area of penal execution, working to improve and extend their intervention, strengthening bonds with families and social networks, to assist service users in their path to desistance. Moreover, they are working to expand and consolidate their relationships with community-based resources, which are essential in the rehabilitation process and transition back to the community.

The video can be accessed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm0_WxqPdQU

(video with subtitles in English)

¹ [https://cejfe.gencat.cat/ca/formacio/gestcon/index.html#googtrans\(calen\)](https://cejfe.gencat.cat/ca/formacio/gestcon/index.html#googtrans(calen))



Background

Penitentiary Social Services

Prison and Probation Social Services (PSS) have a singular characteristic among the European Prison Services, as this service is present at every penitentiary centre, acting as a bridge between prison, inmates, families, and community services. The PSS is present at each province in Catalonia: Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida and Girona since one of the Social Services' pillars is the territorial scope/territory planning in order to enhance coordination with prisons and the community services.

Social Workers depend on the Head of the Penitentiary Social Services, who assigns social workers to each prison. Social Workers have a double dependency as Health Services and Education Services: organically, depending on the Head of the Penitentiary Social Services, but functionally, social workers are absolutely integrated in the prison treatment teams which are multidisciplinary teams composed of a lawyer, a psychologist, two educators and a social worker.

The standard social workers' rate is around 80/90 inmates assigned in closed prisons, and 60/70 inmates assigned between Open Prison and Conditional release.

To write the reports for each inmate assigned to them, social workers pay close attention to Protective, and Risk Environment/Family's Factors, and Family/Environment Capacities since families play a crucial role in the rehabilitation process in the Risk Management Model. Consequently, social workers need to gather the following information on the inmate's families:

- Incomes
- Housing
- Job or occupation
- Family dynamics and organization
- Problems
- Children and people with special needs
- Immigration
- No fixed abode or situation of homelessness: we have agreements with the main Councils and social entities to tackle the situation together.

About the family's capabilities/abilities, social workers need to know, for instance:

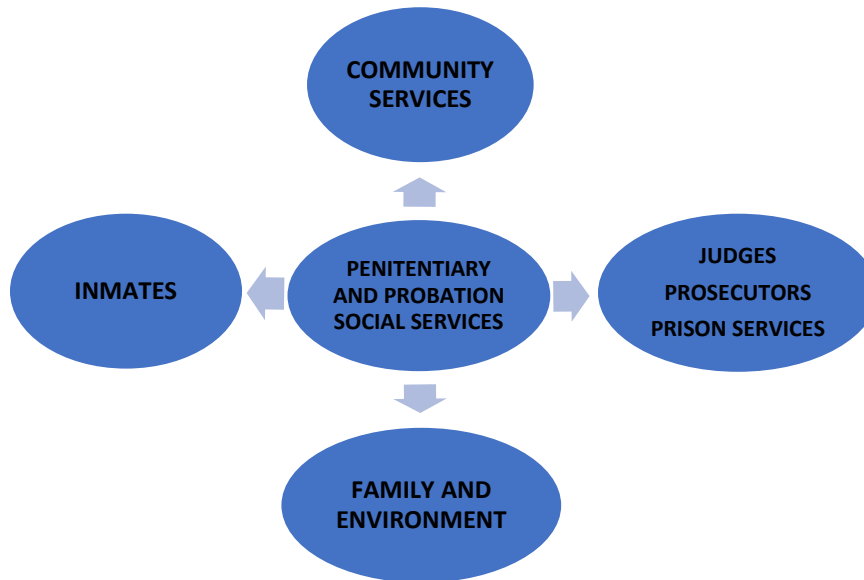
- If they are able to establish limits and detect risk situations.
- Acknowledgment of the difficulties that the family may encounter.
- How they deal with conflict, problem resolution skills and communication style
- The kind of support they offer to the inmate.
- Commitment to collaborate with prison services.

To explore the families' environment, social workers use technical tools such as:

- Family visits
- Interviews
- Documents
- Community Services (municipality)

Social Worker's intervention

Social work intervention unfolds around four scopes which are in constant interaction: community services, inmates, family and wider external environment, judiciary bodies and prison services.



The functions of the intervention are determined, on one hand; by the stage on the sentence, and in the other hand; on the risk assessment of the case. Nevertheless, social workers will assist inmates and coordinate with community services, for instance with their applications to economic aids or the disability degree, regardless of the moment in serving a sentence.

Individualised Treatment Plan

In order to develop a robust Individualised Treatment Plan, the Catalan penitentiary system, through the Risk Management Model, uses their own risk assessment tool, called RisCanvi (Risk-Change). This tool gathers relevant information to inform on the level of risk of harm and risk of recidivism, focusing on dynamic risk factors and criminogenic needs. Aside from this standardised assessment, fed with information from all members of the multidisciplinary team, the social workers will contact the family to gather specific details. The individualised treatment plan is built altogether with different professionals and the service user, in a collaborative approach. This plan includes an itinerary that is tailored for every person and offers a range of activities, programmes and short term/long term objectives. In this matter, families become an agent of support in the completion and commitment with the plan, sharing information and contributing to move forward.

In regard with regime levels, Spanish Penitentiary Organic Law (1979) establishes three levels of judicial sentences served in prison and probation settings:

- Level 1, for high-risk inmates is served in closed units (isolation).
- Level 2 for general population is served in common and closed prisons.
- Level 3: is an open regime where sentences are served in open prisons.
- Conditional sentence: this is subject to licence conditions.

Additionally, Penitentiary Social Services are responsible of following up the case. Therefore, inmates are under the Penitentiary Social Services' supervision upon their definitive release. (Social workers monitor them until release. After releasing it is understood that community services will take over in working with inmates and their families' social needs as reintegration needs co-responsibility from all the services, individuals in the community. However, in certain cases if it needed, community services and Penitentiary Social Services can work together for a stablished period of time.

The cases that are granted to progress to Conditional release, must follow this requirements:

- It is an extraordinary process:
 - From $\frac{1}{2}$ -> first time offenders + sentence no longer than 3 years.
 - Before $\frac{2}{3}$ two-quarters served.
- It is the ordinary process:
 - From $\frac{3}{4}$ three-quarters served.

When the conditional release is approved by Penitentiary Judges, The Penitentiary Social Services Board decides the level. There are three levels of follow up:

- Intensive: minimum each week
- Ordinary: minimum once a month
- Extraordinary: minimum once each two or three months.

Levels are reviewed every three months according to the Risk Management Model.

In addition, foreign inmates can serve this last part of their sentence at their countries if this is of their preference and approved according to certain conditions.

In 2015 the Legislation on criminal law was modified. As a result, conditional release/probation became a suspended sentence.

² <https://www.cep-probation.org/knowledgebases/catalonia-spain/>



Every five years, the Area of Criminal Enforcement of the Centre for Legal Studies and Specialized Training conducts research on recidivism rate, following inmates for 5 years after release. Each research has provided some suggestions in order to lower recidivism rates. The last research on the Prison recidivism rate was conducted on 2020³.

Main recommendations, from the last recidivism research report:

- Put faith in open regime.
- To obtain an automatic and yearly data base related to recidivism.
- To introduce a security, measure to multi re-offenders, or otherwise, to effectively apply aggravating circumstances of recidivism.

Finally, at the XIV Day of Penitentiary Social Services in the Criminal Area⁴, the motto was: *social workers are a collective on the move!* There was a Round table on “Challenges for the future of Penitentiary Social Services in Catalonia”, providing the opportunity to discuss this issues among different professionals on the field. The main conclusions were as follows:

- Further boost the new approach is an exceptional Initial Regime Classification as it allows people who have to serve a sentence to request their case to be considered with this new approach. The Penitentiary Social Services leads this approach which allows to start serving a sentence in an open prison from the very beginning. It avoids breaking people’s lives and family’s ties since they can maintain their jobs and serve their sentence at the same time from the very beginning.
- Increase conditional releases. The General Directorate of Prison Affairs is adamant on moving it from 3/4 served to 2/3 served and to 1/2 for first time offenders who have to serve a sentence shorter than 3 years and can prove a normalised life.
- More socials resources and more engage with the community work. The more penitentiary social statistics the more accurate resources we will have.

³ Recidivism in high-risk releases (2014-2016) 2020.

Centre for Legal Studies and Specialised Training

https://cejfe.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/recerca/cataleg/crono/2022/excarceracions-alt-risc/Informe_executiu_excarceracions_alt_risc_angles.pdf

English research. Centre for Legal Studies and Specialised Training

<https://cejfe.gencat.cat/ca/recerca/cataleg/crono/2023/taxa-reincidencia-penitenciaria/index.html>

<https://cejfe.gencat.cat/ca/recerca/cataleg/estudis-i-recerques-en-llengua-anglesa/index.html>

⁴ XIV Day of Penitentiary Social Work in the Criminal Area

https://cejfe.gencat.cat/ca/detalls/activitatagenda/XIV_jornada_treball_social_penitenciari#gooqtranscalen