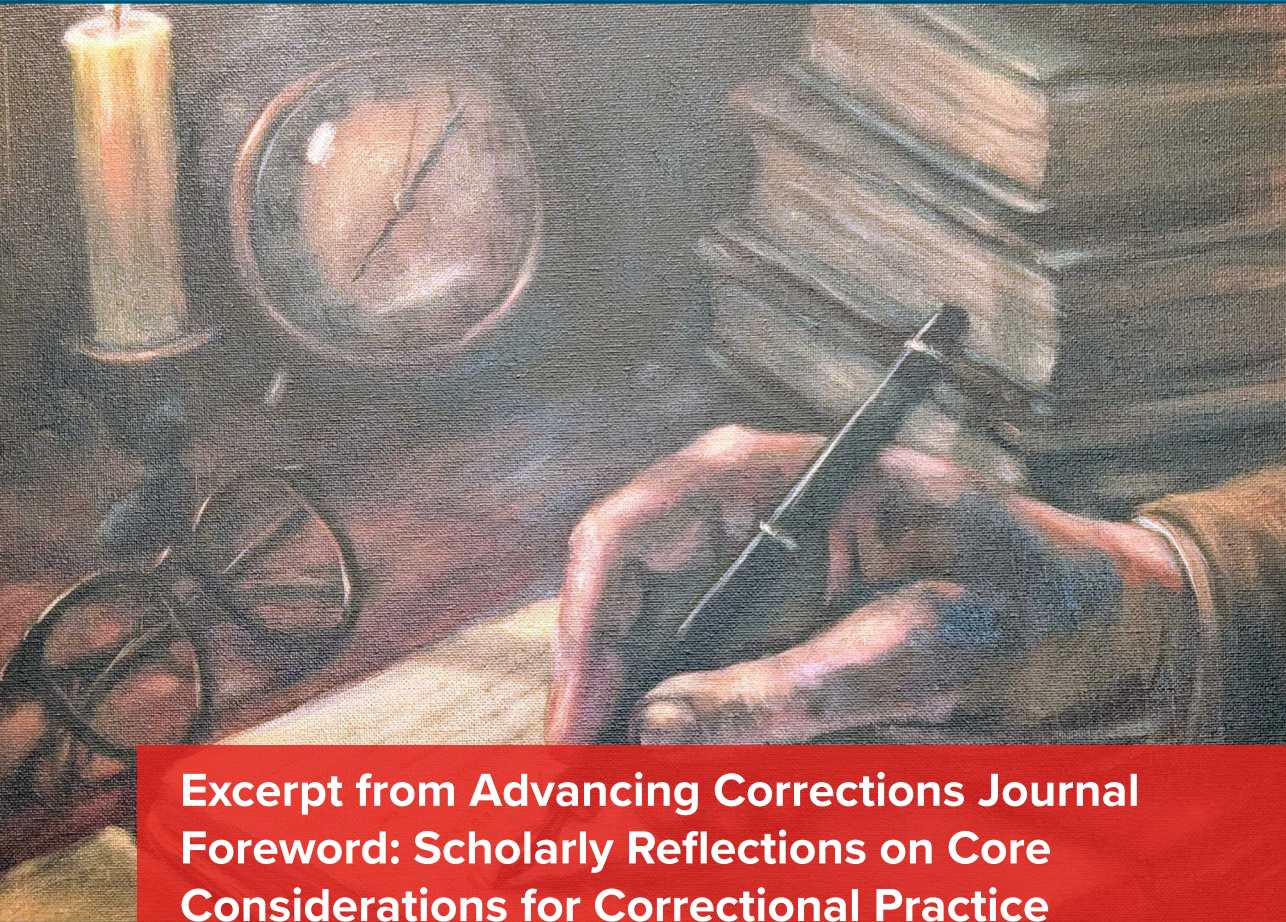


ADVANCING CORRECTIONS

Journal of the International Corrections and Prisons Association



**Excerpt from Advancing Corrections Journal
Foreword: Scholarly Reflections on Core
Considerations for Correctional Practice
(ACJ20-A000)**



**Scholarly Reflections on Core
Considerations for Correctional Practice**

Edition #20 - 2026

www.icpa.org

Scholarly Reflections on Core Considerations for Correctional Practice

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Some ten years ago, in the Foreword to the first Edition of our *Advancing Corrections Journal (ACJ)*, I introduced the journal as “a new initiative for ICPA that is consistent with its avowed objective of embracing ‘evidence’ to support change – to help lead change in corrections more based on data and facts rather than ideology and opinion.” The simple idea was to produce a scholarly, peer-reviewed publication that could speak to practitioners and help explain the place of ‘evidence’ in addressing some of the most important current and emerging issues in the field. The Theme for the first Edition of *ACJ* indeed forecasted what the journal would try to be all about ... supporting the “*Shaping of Practice Through Evidence.*”



Of course, influencing and shaping practice through evidence is far from easy. It often seems like the field of corrections moves a few steps forward but then one or two (or more) backwards. What we know, the evidence we accumulate, has difficulty becoming ‘what we do’, if it isn’t understood and appreciated by practitioners, managers, policymakers and other correctional professionals. For evidence to have ultimate impact, the way evidence can inform practice and improve outcomes has to be explained concretely, neatly, and logically summarized, repeated, and then repeated again. What is more, if a correctional department or system chooses to embrace a particular form of evidence and adopt it into practice, the implementation process is also rife with difficulty. This process—even with the best intentions—can stagnate or halt reform in correctional environments.

In the last decade, *ACJ* explored the knowledge base in a number of key areas of practice. Key themes have included: *Welcoming Disruptions to the Status Quo* (Edition # 2); *Giving Focus to Community Corrections* (Edition # 7); *Investing in Staff* (Edition # 8); *Understanding, Assessing, Managing and Reducing Risk* (Edition # 10); *Innovation in Correctional Healthcare* (Edition # 12); *What Else Works* (Editions # 13 & 14); *Reforming Corrections Through Technology* (Edition # 16); *What is Working With Women* (Edition # 18); and *Excellence in Juvenile Justice Policy and Practice* (Edition # 19). For each Theme, the journal highlighted some state-of-the-art research reviews, good examples of recent practice-relevant research, and numerous descriptions of international best practice and innovation. The journal evolved and matured. *Advancing Corrections* now attracts many more academic responses to our Call for Papers and retains a strong international focus evidenced through the many contributions from around the world. More and more, correctional agencies are choosing *ACJ* to share both their research findings and what they see as remaining challenges. In interesting reciprocal fashion, *ACJ* has helped ICPA grow significantly in influence over the last decade, and vice versa. Through ICPA and *ACJ*, a welcoming home now exists for thousands of correctional professionals worldwide as they keep searching for ways to “connect, learn, share and get re-invigorated.”

For this milestone 20th Edition of *ACJ*, no single theme seemed appropriate. Instead, we wanted

to go wider and deeper and capture the wisdom of some of the most knowledgeable and respected scholars in the field. We thought it worthwhile to collect evidence-informed views from these thought-leaders regarding some of the key challenges in corrections. Rather than asking them to address a specific topic or set of topics, we left it open ended. We were curious to see what kind of 'current and emerging' issues would come to the forefront from the perspective of these scholars. The resulting set of commentaries we hope will serve as an important reference collection for guiding efforts in *Shaping Practice Through Evidence*.

The 28 commentaries in the Edition hone in on a variety of practice issues, some addressing obvious and long-standing challenges, others raising relatively new and not yet broadly recognized ones; some discussing what may be opportunities if properly managed, and others pointing to risks worth avoiding.

A number of our scholars kept referring to a fundamental shift in focus as perhaps the most essential redirection for the field. That is, they called for a shift away from the singular emphasis on 'fixing' justice-involved individuals and towards a more foundational aim to 'fix' our corrections environments. Several scholar/authors pointed to the 'uncomfortable' truth that our prison environments are, for the most part, not at all equipped or designed to be 'rehabilitative' (Day). They can be inhumane, unfair and unjust, and actually anti-rehabilitative in many ways. At the extreme, they can be quite 'criminogenic' and spill even more crime into our communities rather than preventing it (Luyt). Rather than organized and managed to support positive change for those who live there and a meaningful avocation for those who work there, "in reality they are punishing places garnished with isolated bubbles of ad hoc positive activity" (Polaschek).

One argument is that the preoccupation with 'security' and 'safety' in the contemporary prison creates both moral and ethical blindness, where prison staff and managers become easily "insensitive to the humans at the heart of their practice" (Warr). The continued acceptance of some practices that can clearly do harm, like solitary confinement, is a good example of this kind of blindness and organizational irrationality (Rudes). Another is how correctional services tend to focus almost exclusively on the needs of the people we incarcerate, ignoring the needs and concerns of family members and other loved ones, even though family member wellbeing can have dramatic impact on the wellbeing of those we incarcerate (Comfort & Harris).

But all is not gloom and doom. We also know quite a bit about what 'good' prison environments look like and what can make them healthy and positive places to live and work (Crewe; Liebling). Researchers are emphasizing that correctional services should be about more than the interventions we deliver. What also matters is how "prison climate and policy choices – through normalization, autonomy, and preparation for release – directly relate to wellbeing and shape opportunities for reintegration" (van Ginneken). At the heart of the good prison is also the recognition that prison work is not only difficult but can be a serious threat to the health and personal well-being of those who work there (Frost & Nahikian; Ricciardelli). Supporting and elevating the professional identity of prison officers and nurturing their emotional and mental health is what will help prisons remain as safe, decent, and fair places to live and work (Kvam). Beyond the 'pains of imprisonment', there has to be more understanding of the very significant 'pains of employment' within correctional settings, the emotional toll of the work and the 'moral

labour' that has to be endured. Honest and realistic training efforts are needed to prepare staff in confronting those pains as they continue to be "exposed to injustice in their enactment of justice" (*Ricciardelli*).

Several of our scholars went further in challenging not just the culture but the underlying physical and psychological 'feel' of the traditional prison environment. A compelling argument suggests that humane, evidence-informed design should pay much more attention to the impact of both the 'soundscape' (*Herrity*) and the 'greenspace' (*Moran*) of those environments. It is increasingly recognized that "prisons are more than sites of confinement; they are multi-sensory landscapes that actively shape behavior, health and experience" (*Turner*). Correctional agencies should readily engage both incarcerated people and staff to arrive at "design choices that balance safety and security with the embodied realities of living and working in these environments" (*Turner*).

Our understanding of what a 'good' prison should be all about comes mostly from research conducted in a Western context where there is more or less adequate resourcing and relatively little deprivation compared to the reality in many low-income, developing nations. From an African perspective, however, we are reminded that "any service, no matter what the budget, the fiscal constraints, or the challenges, can do more with less" (*Ahimbisibwe & Ricciardelli*). What may matter most is giving purpose, to both prisoners and staff, treating each other with respect, and offering whatever might be possible as opportunities for self-improvement.

Narrowing in on how the prison experience can be particularly traumatic if it fails to consider the special needs (concerns & preferences) of particular vulnerable groups, two of our commentaries address the complex issue of managing the growing transgender population in custody (*Jenness et al.; Maycock*). There are no easy solutions but trying to avoid or pretend there is no problem is clearly a very basic human rights violation.

The centrality of trauma in the lives of justice involved women has now been well established. Acknowledging the need for tailored, trauma-responsive interventions and person-centered models of care is now considered mainstream correctional wisdom, no longer just an afterthought. Quite interestingly, however, what is now being realized is that this framework is capable of transforming correctional policy and practice for *all* justice-involved individuals. It can apply equally to both women and men in humanizing correctional services (*Salisbury*).

Thinking of what the future will look like for correctional services inevitably raises the issue of the opportunities but also the risks inherent in embracing the new 'digital'. Two of our commentaries delve into the concerns around the increasing 'digitalization' of the correctional environment. We are cautioned to reflect on how digitalization can transform important 'relational dynamics' within prison, not necessarily with only positive outcomes (*Pardon & Beyens*). However, as another expert commentary points out, the potential harms of unchecked expansion of digital can be avoided with an ethically informed and rights-based approach focused on "enabling human flourishing, reducing inequality, and strengthening communities" (*Knight & Ross*).

Correctional services are not just about prisons. If prisons fail to contribute in some way to some ultimate 'rehabilitation' and 'reintegration' of justice involved individuals, they are not doing their work, not serving the public interest. But community supervision and support, whether post-release from prison or on probation, plays an equally important, if not more important role in this rehabilitation endeavor. One of our commentaries gives us an easily digested summary of what is meant by 'What Works' in either institutional or community corrections (*Taxman*). We know that following a set of well-researched 'What Works' practices and principles can give us predictively better outcomes (if there is fidelity to those practices and principles). But in another commentary, we are asked to reflect on whether we should focus so exclusively on reducing risk and measuring success of our efforts only in terms of recidivism. An alternative might be to adopt a 'better than arrival', well-being paradigm that "broadens the definition of correctional success, invites new partners into the work (including universities), and creates opportunities for visible, incremental improvement in people's lives" (*Wright*). This well-being focused paradigm resonates as well with the stark reality in many of our communities of "persistent barriers in employment, housing, health, and family life for Black men, Black women, and other marginalized groups" (*Williams*). These inequities may require a more fundamental correctional and community responses focused on "building collaborative, culturally responsive, and structurally transformative reentry systems." And perhaps at the core of our approach to community supervision should be the notion of *hope*, not just as a psychological construct, but as a "central concept that shapes how probation is experienced, delivered, and understood" (*Phillips et al.*). Incorporating the views and insights of individuals with 'experiential knowledge' into program design and policy development would certainly also help (*Ross*).

Building on the idea that there are phases to ultimate desistance from offending, *Fergus McNeill* reviews some of the evidence pointing to a necessary third phase, *securing acceptance and belonging within a community*. And here is a significant rub for correctional services; the fact that we have limited control in how well this can happen; in how well we can "affect the social contexts where people find – or fail to find – acceptance and belonging."

The challenge of *Shaping Practice Through Evidence* will endure but there is good reason to persist. I thought it fitting to end this short Foreword on a positive note. One of the most highly respected criminologists in America argued some 20 years ago that rehabilitation should be the 'guiding paradigm for corrections' (*Cullen, 2007*)¹. In one of the articles in this Edition, *Cullen & Jonson* reiterate this position and present convincing evidence that belief in rehabilitation continues as a "habit of the heart," even in the country with one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. They conclude this is a "a significant cultural resource for practitioners and policy reformers who can use public opinion to justify offender treatment as democracy at work." We can quibble about whether 'rehabilitation' is the right term to use, but the public knows what it means. Correctional work is expected to assist justice involved individuals to turn their lives around...to heal, learn, manage their demon(s) and eventually contribute positively to their communities. Trying to shape correctional practice to achieve better 'rehabilitative' outcomes can be incredibly difficult, often frustrating and at times rather discouraging. We need to remind ourselves we are making this effort not just for the people who get entangled in our justice systems, but for the staff who do the work and for our communities who expect us to

¹ Cullen, F. T. (2007). Make rehabilitation corrections' guiding paradigm. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6, 717-728.

make a difference. We are obliged to keep doing better because our communities expect us to.

I close this Foreword by giving a very special thank you to my three Co-Editors for this 20th Anniversary Edition; Rosemary Ricciardelli; Danielle S. Rudes and Kevin Wright. They offered their very comforting support in conceiving and promoting this Edition of *ACJ*. Despite their own very busy 'scholarly' lives, they were fully engaged in helping review manuscripts and offering feedback. Going above and beyond, all three also provided their own scholarly contributions to this Edition. This Edition of *ACJ* deserved a special cover, and I finally want to thank our artist **Jared Riley** for sharing his captivating image.

It has been a sincere privilege for me to be involved in Editing 20 Editions of *ACJ*, and this Edition in particular. It is unlikely that I will be around for another 20 years, but I am confident that the journal will continue for even longer.

Your comments on this special Edition of *ACJ* or on the journal more generally are welcomed. Please give us evidence that you are out there reading and learning from this publication.

My warmest regards.

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