



Research Publication

Process evaluation of the Practice
Guide for Intervention (PGI)

Staff experiences of implementation
and continuing service delivery

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background and methods

Research has indicated that traditional forms of community supervision that focus primarily on compliance are unlikely to have a positive impact on offenders' likelihood of reoffending. Correctional services across international jurisdictions have subsequently developed models of service delivery to offenders in the community that enhance the ability of supervising officers to act as agents of change and promote behaviour change in the offenders they supervise.

Recently, Corrective Services NSW has implemented the Practice Guide for Intervention (PGI), a suite of activities for Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) to complete with offenders under their supervision.

The PGI was implemented in Community Corrections offices across NSW in 2016 and 2017, providing a detailed User Guide of activity templates focused on behaviour change for use with offenders, as well as training and ongoing support for CCOs by a team of Practice Managers.

This study seeks to gain a clearer understanding of the process of implementation of the PGI by Corrective Services NSW, and explore the experiences of CCOs in their ongoing use of the PGI with offenders. The study aims to assess how features of implementation have affected the ways CCOs use the PGI, and how this has affected their work with offenders.

Researchers conducted a total of 56 semi-structured interviews with CCOs in 12 Community Corrections offices between October and December 2017, representing a range of different operational contexts and offender cohorts. Researchers identified common narrative themes among participants based on qualitative analysis of interview transcripts.

1.2 Key Findings

The launch of the PGI was conducted in a 'staged' manner, with increasing levels of training and support provided over a long lead-in period before the introduction of delivery requirements and associated performance indicators. According to CCOs, this structure initially left many confused and led to some resistance and slow uptake of the PGI. Many felt that it did not provide the comprehensive practical training and support they would have expected and wanted during the early roll-out period for such a significant shift in officers' way of working with offenders.

CCOs highlighted the importance of formal supports in the ongoing implementation of the PGI, with Practice Managers being the most helpful example of this. Their support was highly rated by interviewees, and had a strong impact on CCOs' knowledge, confidence and appreciation of the PGI.

The PGI User Guide was instrumental in the introduction of the PGI to the vast majority of CCOs, and is seen as clear and helpful by CCOs. It continues to be used for planning sessions, general learning about PGI exercises, as a guide during sessions and to inform written case-notes. Informal (and formal) discussions in the office were also seen as helpful by many CCOs.

Interviewees' suggestions for improving the support provided included more training, greater focus on practical instruction for how to deliver PGI exercises, and enhanced professional development to scaffold their learning of the PGI. Enhancements to the PGI itself mainly involved expanding content to better match the changing needs of offenders and CCOs over time.

Interviewees typically reported regular ongoing uptake of the PGI, with most using a PGI exercise in all (or almost all) sessions with offenders. When deciding on which modules and exercises to use, interviewees often considered the relevance of the issue and the approach to the offender, the interests of the offender and the attractiveness of the worksheets. Some interviewees highlighted the importance of being familiar with PGI exercises and having the opportunity to try exercises out before using them with offenders.

Apart from the mandatory assessment exercises (#1.1 and #1.2), the most frequently used modules were #2 ('Achieving Goals'), which was seen as important to the case planning process. Others commonly used included #4 ('Managing Stress') and #7 ('Managing Cravings'), which were perceived as frequently relevant to the needs of many offenders. Modules #3 ('Dealing with Setbacks') and #9 ('Communication') were commonly mentioned as being used very little, with some interviewees noting that they are either not relevant to the needs of their supervisees or use unhelpful language.

Interviewees generally noted that they use worksheets in sessions often. However, a large number of CCOs also reported delivering PGI exercises in sessions verbally or by other means. Interviewees generally rated the written worksheets highly, but often noted the importance of considering the preferences and responsivity factors of the offender. A substantial minority of interviewees said they rarely use the worksheets, with many noting that they often use the exercise as a guide for the issues to discuss, but do not follow them directly.

1.3 Conclusions

Overall, there has been broad take-up of the PGI by CCOs, and most understand it and use it extensively as a core component of their supervision of offenders. The work of the Practice Managers appears to have been critical to achieving this after some initial implementation difficulties prior to their introduction. This underscores the value of providing consistent and comprehensive support throughout all stages of a systematic reform such as the PGI.

Findings from this study also highlighted variance in perceptions of the central utility of the PGI, either as a manual of exercises for CCOs to adhere to, or a more broadly defined intervention aimed at improving CCOs' understanding of criminogenic needs and their professional capabilities in addressing those needs. Different interpretations of this purpose across CCOs may lead to substantially different ways of delivering PGI exercises. The results indicated that while there is interest in, and scope for, shifting the focus of the PGI towards a more general professional development tool, CCOs tended to prefer the PGI as a suite of specific interventions available for their use.

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2 INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been increasing recognition that traditional forms of supervising offenders in the community may not have the intended impact on recidivism. Reviews have indicated that traditional intensive supervision programs that primarily focus on compliance with conditions of the community-based order have almost no impact on general recidivism, and could potentially have iatrogenic effects, increasing the likelihood of recidivism (Bonta et al., 2008; Cullen et al., 1996; Gendreau et al., 2001).

In contrast, studies have found that supervision that incorporates therapeutic elements can lead to substantial reductions in recidivism (Andrews et al., 1990). For example, Bonta et al. (2008) found supervision that is provided in accordance with identified principles of effective intervention with offenders can lead to a reduction in the likelihood of reoffending by up to 50%. These principles, which are encompassed by the Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) model, were summarised by Andrews et al. (1990; Andrews & Bonta, 2010) as:

- **Risk** of recidivism posed by the offender, which refers to the individual's likelihood of reoffending and is indicative of the intensity of intervention required. Intensive interventions are prioritised for offenders identified as at high risk of reoffending.
- **Needs** of the offender, which refers to criminogenic needs or dynamic risk factors presented by an individual which have a causal relationship with their likelihood of recidivism. An assessment of the offender's needs determine the foci of interventions for that offender.
- **Responsivity** factors of the offender, which are important considerations in how intervention is delivered. Effective intervention employs delivery methods that are most suited to target offenders' needs, abilities and preferences and are therefore expected to influence the offender's engagement with the intervention.

An important additional principle of the RNR model for offender supervision is that of professional override, which indicates that a supervisor may consider factors beyond Risk, Need and Responsivity, and change elements of the supervision so that it is appropriate to the offender when formulating case management needs and providing intervention (Bonta et al., 2013).

The RNR model provides a critical platform for how behaviour change interventions, including community-based supervision in which the supervising officer acts as an agent of change, can be effectively designed and delivered. In addition, research has identified a number of 'core correctional practices' or therapeutic practices and service delivery techniques used in supervision sessions with offenders that have an empirical relationship with effects on recidivism (e.g. Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Latessa et al., 2013). Effective skills for service delivery with offenders have been codified in editions of the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (Gendreau et al., 2010), and include anti-criminal modelling; effective reinforcement; effective disapproval; effective use of authority; structured learning; problem solving; cognitive restructuring; and relationship skills.

In recent years several jurisdictions around the world have worked to improve models of supervision for offenders in the community through effective application of both RNR principles and core correctional practices. For example, the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) program was developed in 2005 and has since been implemented by Public Safety Canada (Bonta et al., 2013). The STICS program provides training to officers that aims to increase their capacities to develop collaborative working relationships with offenders; orient service delivery towards the importance of identifying and addressing criminogenic needs; and apply cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to effect improvements in those needs, with a particular focus on antisocial or offence supportive attitudes (Bonta et al., 2011). A second critical component of the model involved ongoing clinical support to develop skills from training. Initial

evaluation studies have indicated that implementation of STICS has been associated with positive uptake of skills among officers and reductions in reoffending (Bonta et al., 2011, 2013).

Other models also followed this approach, including the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS: Smith et al., 2012) and Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR: Robinson et al., 2012) programs. Research has found evidence of improved practice among trained staff, including additional focus on criminogenic needs (e.g. Smith et al., 2012) and use of cognitive techniques in sessions (Robinson et al., 2011), in addition to improved supervision outcomes for the EPICS and STARR programs (Lowenkamp et al., 2012; Robinson et al., 2011).

The STICS and similar programs have primarily been oriented towards training supervising officers in effective principles and processes of interactions with offenders as agents of change. Other models have added to this by generating specific content focused on behaviour change that may be applied to sessions in order to ensure that they follow these principles. For example, the Citizenship program employed by the United Kingdom National Probation Service incorporates a series of modules, to be delivered by officers as well as partner agencies, which address specific criminogenic needs relating to alcohol misuse, drug misuse, lifestyle and associates, relationships, and wellbeing (Bruce & Hollin, 2009; Pearson et al., 2011).

Recent research has indicated that this approach to improving therapeutic content of interactions with offenders under community supervision can be effective. Offenders who underwent the Citizenship program were found to have a 31% reduction in reconviction rates when compared to a previous cohort of offenders who received traditional probationary supervision (Pearson et al., 2011).

Following the implementation of new models of community-based supervision in other international jurisdictions, Corrective Services NSW has developed the PGI, implemented as part of the Enhanced Offender Supervision stream of the Reducing Re-offending Reforms. The primary innovation of this model is the development of a series of 56 manualised exercises across 13 modules that can be used by supervising officers to enhance the behaviour change content of sessions and address identified criminogenic needs with offenders as part of routine supervision. Under the PGI model supervising officers generate a personalised plan of delivery of exercises with each offender based on their assessed risk and needs profile, and are given flexibility to deliver content in ways that are appropriate to responsivity factors of the offender (e.g. using written worksheets or verbally). An additional, complementary innovation of the PGI is the creation of a state-wide team of Practice Managers who provide ongoing support to supervising officers in their delivery of the model and associated professional development.

2.1 The current study

The current study is the first in a series that aims to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the PGI as delivered by Corrective Services NSW. Evaluation of the PGI implementation is aligned with the Department of Justice Monitoring and Evaluation framework for the NSW Government Strategies to Reduce Reoffending.

The aim of this study is to examine supervising officers' perspectives on the initial implementation of the PGI and their uptake and application of the model over time. To achieve this we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with a sample of staff at Community Corrections offices across NSW. Particular areas of inquiry included:

- Is the PGI being implemented and delivered as intended?
- What are officers' perceptions of the PGI compared to previous supervision practices?
- Are officers receiving appropriate training and ongoing support in uptake and delivery of the PGI?
- What are officers' perceptions of the utility and applicability of various components of the PGI?

3 METHOD

3.1 Sample and design

This study employed a semi-structured interview qualitative design to examine perspectives of Community Corrections staff in relation to the implementation and use of the PGI. A total sample of 56 staff at 12 Community Corrections offices in six different regions across NSW were interviewed between October and December 2017.

3.1.1 Participant Sample

A total of 56 interviews were conducted in 12 Community Corrections offices, with a target of five supervising staff in each office (see Table 1).

Table 1 Regions and Offices where interviews were conducted

Regions & Offices	CCOs	% interviewees
Hunter	9	16%
Cessnock	4	
Maitland	5	
Northern	8	14%
Kempsey	5	
Port Macquarie	3	
Southern	14	25%
Nowra	4	
Wagga Wagga	5	
Wollongong	5	
Sydney Central	5	9%
Sydney City	5	
Sydney South West	5	9%
Fairfield	5	
West	15	27%
Bathurst	5	
Goulburn	5	
Wellington	5	
Total	56	100%

Interviewees represented a mix of several positions, most commonly Community Corrections Officer (39%), but a substantial minority were Senior CCOs (25%), and several were Unit Leaders, as seen in Figure 1 below¹. Approximately 30% of interviewees were trainees at the time of interview, with 42% having supervised offenders for a year or less (Figure 2). More than three quarters of interviewees provide support to offenders in the community, while the rest work in Parole Units providing pre-release support to offenders in custody

¹ While supervising officers in the sample had a number of different positions and role titles, for the purposes of brevity we refer to interviewees in total as Community Corrections Officers or CCOs, unless otherwise noted.

(Figure 3). All but two of the interviewees were officers with current workloads either in Community Units or Parole Units². All had substantial experience using the PGI.

Figure 1 Current positions of interviewees (n=56)

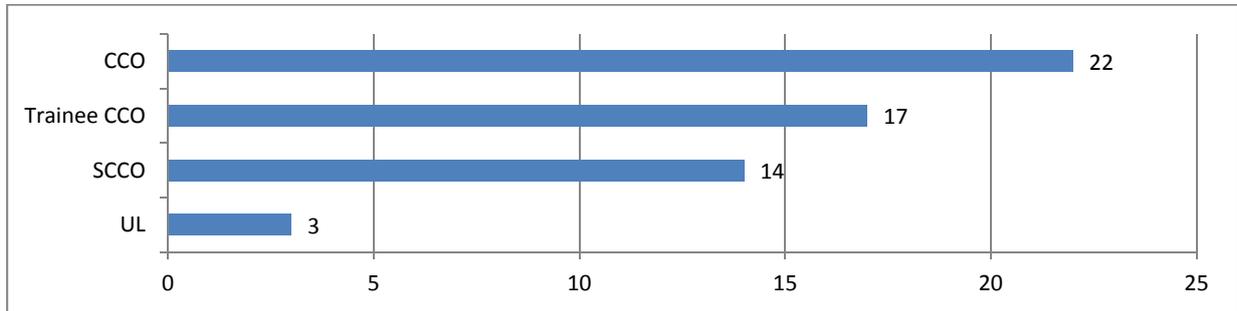


Figure 2 Time as CCO (n=56)

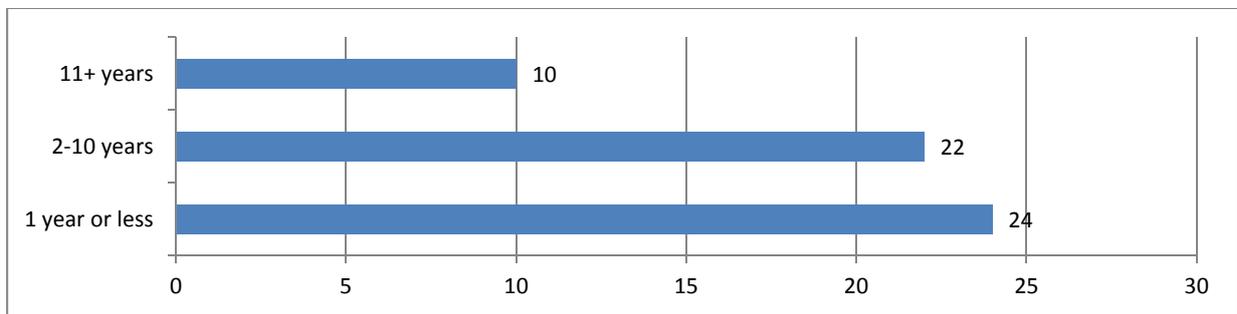


Figure 3 Unit (n=56)

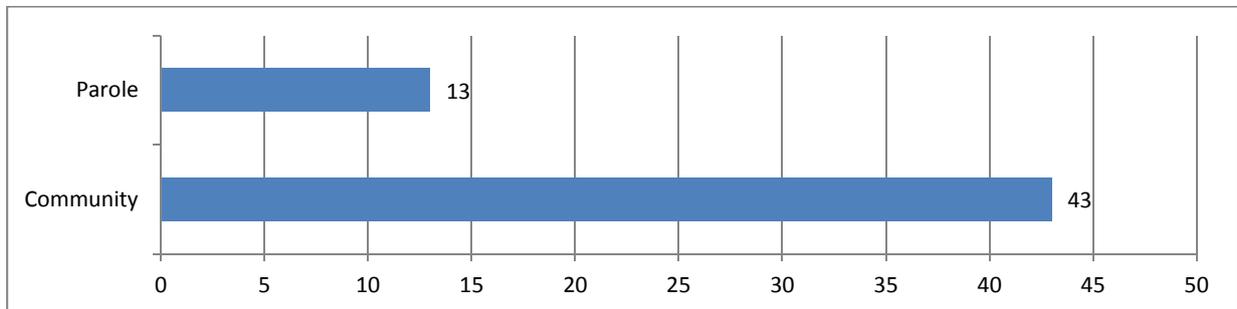
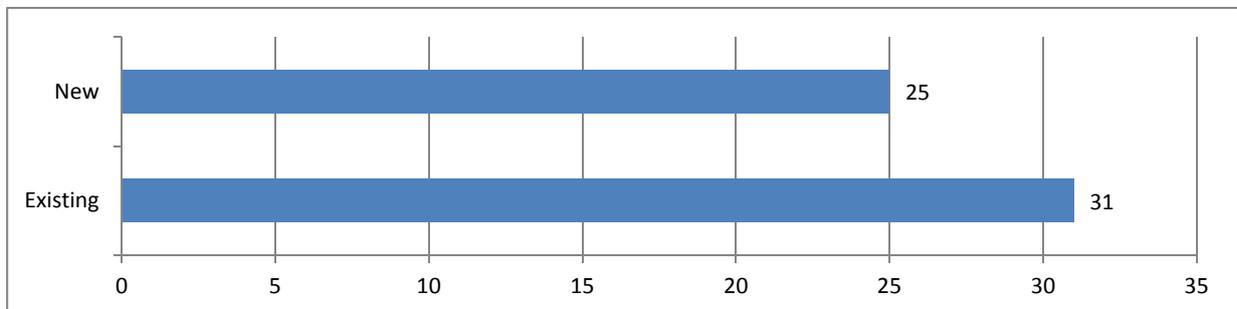


Figure 4 New vs Existing CCOs (n=56)



² One interviewee was working as a Unit Leader without a regular portfolio of clients, while another was working temporarily as a Court Duty Officer.

Interviewees were nearly evenly split between those who had received training in understanding and delivering PGI exercises in supervision as part of their core training at Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy (BFCSA) and those who had already completed their training when the PGI was being rolled out (Figure 4). This variable has been used in the analysis below as a proxy measure to count 'new' versus 'existing' CCOs.

3.1.2 Community Corrections site selection

A total of 12 sites were selected for interviews. The aim of the site selection strategy was to sample a wide range of different types of Community Corrections office, catering to a wide range of different offenders. These included offices in metropolitan, regional and remote locations. Only offices with a minimum of 10 CCOs were selected, in order to increase the chances of successfully recruiting five CCOs from each office.

It is noted that neither the sample of CCOs nor the sites represented in this study were randomised or stratified. Sites and CCOs were selected for interviews based on a convenience sampling method, with the aim of obtaining the views and experiences of a wide range of CCOs, working in a wide range of contexts. Consequently, results detailed below should not be seen as representative of the views and experience of all CCOs, but rather indicative of the narratives common among different groups of CCOs.

3.2 Data processing and analysis

3.2.1 Recording and transcription

All but two of the interviewees consented to have their interviews recorded in full. Audio recordings of interviews were later transcribed verbatim for the purposes of analysis. For those interviewees who did not consent to full recording, detailed interview notes were taken by hand.

3.2.2 Preparation of data and assessment of coding reliability

Transcripts of interview recordings and notes were imported into QSR NVivo 12, qualitative data analysis software, and reviewed to help develop a coding framework. The 'coding framework', according to which the interview data was divided into categories (or 'codes'), was developed in an iterative process by two research analysts.

The coding framework was updated based on issues identified as part of the intercoder reliability testing process. After coding a total of 12 interviews and updating the coding framework, the team reached a level of agreement of $K=0.71$, which is identified as 'substantial agreement' according to Landis & Koch (1977). Minor amendments to the coding framework were made by one research analyst as part of the analysis process. These were mostly combinations of existing codes and sub-codes.

3.2.3 Coding and analysis

All 56 interviews were coded into data categories according to the finalised coding framework. The coded data was then analysed using QSR NVivo and MS Excel, with frequencies and crosstabulations by interviewee attributes collected to identify patterns and themes.

3.2.4 Denominators in reporting

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews conducted with CCOs, not every interviewee answered every question included in the interview guide. Because of this, there were some differences in the denominators used in some of the calculations of percentages in this report. For many calculations, the denominator is all 56 interviewees (or all members of relevant sub-groups), while for others the denominator used is the total number of interviewees who answered the question or discussed the issue. Where necessary for clarity, the correct denominator has been noted in the sections of this report.

4 INTRODUCTION OF THE PGI

The rollout of the PGI for CCOs was ‘staged’, with slowly increasing levels of training and support provided over a long lead-in period before the introduction of comprehensive delivery Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This was aimed at providing officers with sufficient time to become familiar with, and appreciate the benefits of, the new model. According to CCOs, however, this structure initially left many confused and led to resistance and slow uptake of the PGI.

4.1 Introduction of the PGI as a staged rollout

The preparatory groundwork for the PGI was established by Community Corrections prior to its implementation. In 2015, Community Corrections held a staff development seminar with selected staff members to launch the initial PGI User Guide (prior to finalisation of all the PGI materials). DVD copies of presentations from this seminar were distributed state-wide.

The PGI was implemented starting with an initial introductory period between June 2016 and December 2016 (see Figure 5). During this time CCOs were encouraged to read and try using PGI exercises with their supervisees without the obligation of KPIs³. One-day training seminars covering the PGI were also delivered to all offices by Brush Farm Academy staff during this period.

In August 2016, Justice NSW approved 50 additional CCO and Unit Leader positions aimed at supporting a range of reform strategies, including the introduction of the PGI, to be recruited in late 2016⁴. Additional funding was also made available around this time to form the PGI Practice Unit, aimed at improving the effectiveness of the PGI through the supervisory support role of local Practice Managers.

During the second stage of this process, between January 2017 and May 2017, CCOs were required to deliver selected PGI exercises (1.1 and 1.2) to their supervisees, and were encouraged, although not required, to deliver other exercises as they saw fit⁵. Practice Managers began providing training and support to CCOs in most offices from March 2017.

Full PGI delivery standards were instituted in June 2017, with CCOs working with offenders in the community required to deliver a PGI exercise in a minimum of 70% of sessions (and 90% of case plans) with supervisees assessed as medium risk or above⁶. Practice Manager sessions, and other support activities, continued during and after this period.

³ Assistant Commissioner’s Memorandum 2016/15

⁴ Assistant Commissioner’s Memorandum 2016/33

⁵ Assistant Commissioner’s Memorandum 2017/09

⁶ Assistant Commissioner’s Memorandum 2017/11

Figure 5 Stages of PGI implementation⁷



In most offices, interviewees generally felt that opportunities provided for them to learn about how to use the PGI were limited during the initial introduction period. Interviewees working in some regions during this stage did, however, participate in structured learning activities. These included mainly regional training days and visits from CSNSW management, and were generally focused on the theoretical background to the PGI.

All newly hired CCOs, who began their training after the initial introduction of the PGI in July 2016, received training covering the PGI as part of their core initial training at the BFCSA. Some of these staff members also participated in office-based learning activities.

4.2 Introductory training and support

Overall, both new and existing interviewees who participated in structured learning during the initial stages of their introduction to the PGI commonly felt that it was not sufficient to enable them to effectively and confidently deliver exercises to offenders.

New CCOs commonly felt that the core training they received did not include enough of a focus on the PGI, often noting that only a few sessions across multiple weeks of training were spent discussing the PGI. They also commonly felt that sessions relating to the PGI were very theoretical and did not provide enough practical instruction on how to deliver the various PGI exercises.

Similarly, many CCOs felt that the learning opportunities provided to them during the initial stages of the introduction of the PGI were not as extensive and practical as they would have liked for a reform of this magnitude. CCOs commonly explained that they would have expected detailed overviews of the different PGI exercises, as well as instructions for how to choose the right exercises based on the needs of the offender, and to deliver them practically and effectively.

⁷ Some elements were introduced during, rather than at the beginning of, these periods.

"It's very self-motivated. Like everything- like you literally get the book given to you at the academy and it's basically... 'Go figure it out. Go and read it.' That's not how I learn. I found that was super frustrating. I want to have conversations about it. I want to have people's experience put into it so - whether right or wrong it's not about really, like, talk to me about it." -138

CCOs noted that the lack of clear instructions during the implementation phase, combined with an increasing focus on performance indicators, led for many to feelings of confusion and resistance to the PGI. Some noted that they initially felt that the PGI was more about assessing the efficiency of CCOs than about improving supervision of offenders. CCOs were also concerned that a lack of understanding of the exercises, and confidence delivering them, may have limited the range and effectiveness of their use.

"Probably not feeling that confident at the start with them, and maybe a little bit overwhelmed. And that grey area of whether it was to test me or to really benefit an offender, and I think that's still probably a big part of that confusion, you know even with the stats and all the rest of it. You know, 'Is this about us getting checked or is this about us doing our job better to help people?'" -145

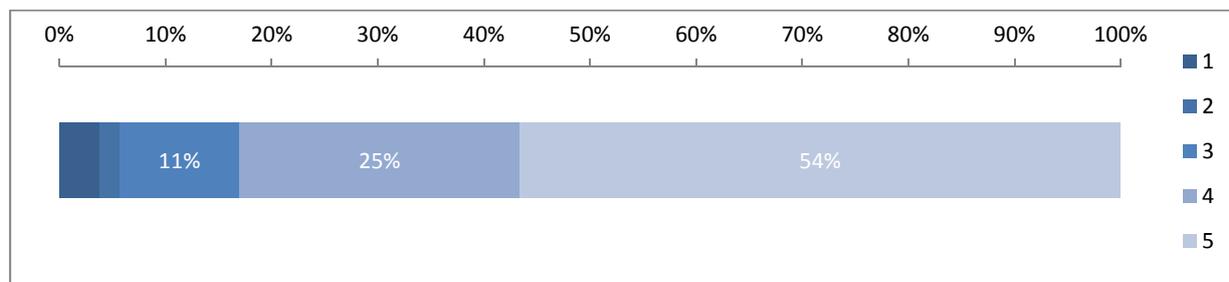
5 FACILITATORS OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

In discussions regarding their experiences with the introduction of the PGI, interviewees mentioned a variety of elements that were helpful to the development of their skills and confidence for delivering supervision using the PGI. The most commonly mentioned support that helped was Practice Managers, but the PGI User Guide⁸, as well as informal (and formal) discussions in the office, also helped greatly at different times during the introduction of the PGI. Interviewees also made a variety of suggestions for changes that could help them, and future CCOs, learn and use the PGI.

5.1 Practice Managers

The most appreciated, and arguably most important, element of support provided to CCOs to assist them in using the PGI with offenders has been the support provided by Practice Managers. Overall, interviewees rated the quality of the support they received from their local Practice Manager highly (average score 4.3), with 79% rating support received at 4 out of 5 or higher (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Interviewee ratings of Practice Manager support (n=53)



Overall ratings were confirmed by interviewee comments about the quality of Practice Manager support, with approximately two thirds of respondents making positive comments, and under one quarter making negative comments. When asked about aspects of the overall training and support they'd received that were particularly helpful, interviewees also mentioned Practice Managers more frequently than any other factor: more than half of respondents who answered the question made reference to Practice Managers in this regard.

CCOs commonly felt that Practice Managers were highly knowledgeable and provided them with practical support and instruction on how to deliver a wide variety of different PGI exercises.

"Yeah, him coming out – because he does take that time – if you need to ask something we went through it step by step. We went through and he used his PGIs for pre-sentence stage or pre-release stage or these ones for sex offenders – we've got list now that we can go, 'Okay, these ones would be good for this one.'"

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⁸ The term 'User Guide' used in this report refers to the full document given to CCOs, including both the 'user guide' and the 'modules'.

By far the most commonly mentioned type of support, raised by 84% of interviewees, is regular sessions provided by the Practice Manager in the Community Corrections office, almost always to all CCOs, regardless of unit. These sessions commonly involve either training activities or general discussions about the PGI. The elements of these sessions most often mentioned as helpful by interviewees were direct advice from Practice Manager and facilitated discussion with the other CCOs.

Another form of support commonly provided by Practice Managers, as mentioned by half of all interviewees, was email and phone support. Interviewees mentioned that they knew, and appreciated, that the Practice Manager is available to answer questions via phone or email. Many CCOs noted that they had contacted the Practice Manager about questions they had, mostly via email. Such free interaction was more common at offices where the Practice Manager had previously been a local CCO or Unit Leader and staff had an existing relationship with them.

“His enthusiasm is contagious... Yeah. I've always been a bit cynical about things but it's very refreshing to see someone who believes that these exercises can work. So very happy with the support because I'll spear off an email to him and I'll get something back in 20 minutes unless he's in a course or whatever. But I'll get something back, you know.”

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According to around one quarter of interviewees, the Practice Manager is often available for informal conversations and support in their office. They commonly noted that the Practice Manager stays in the office before and after regular sessions, and makes him or herself available to answer CCO's questions. Furthermore, interviewees from four offices mentioned that their Practice Manager was actually 'based' at their office regularly. Often this involved one or two days a week during which the Practice Manager had a desk and managed their work from the Community Corrections office. Interviewees mentioned that their Practice Manager was often available for informal support discussions about the PGI during these days.

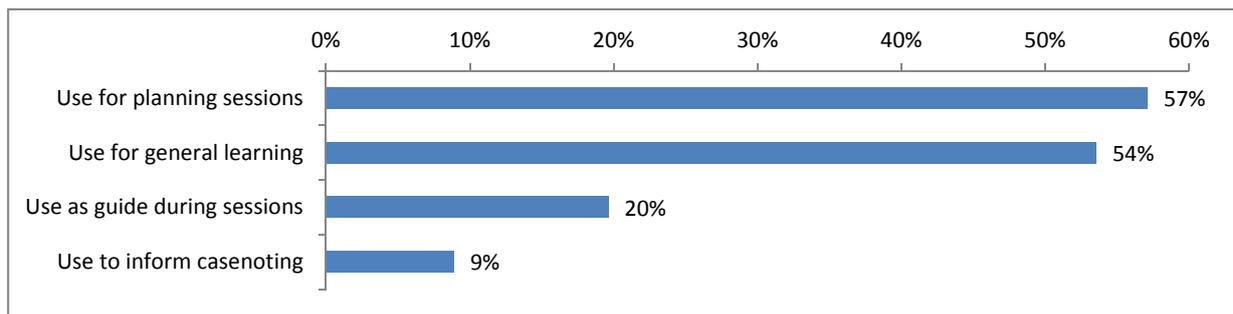
5.2 The PGI User Guide

More than half of interviewees mentioned that the PGI User Guide was instrumental to their learning about the PGI during the initial stages of introducing the PGI. CCOs commonly noted that the bulk of their learning about PGI delivery was done by reading and using the PGI User Guide to deliver exercises. A number of interviewees felt that this was not an ideal situation, and noted that this was not the way they would have liked to learn practical skills in delivery of PGI exercises.

The PGI User Guide, however, was generally seen as extremely helpful, and even critical to CCOs' ability to effectively deliver PGI exercises. Consequently, it was second most commonly mentioned by CCOs as a 'particularly helpful' element of the support they received to use the PGI, and 79% of all interviewees stated that they use the PGI User Guide to support their use of the PGI.

As illustrated in Figure 7 below, the most common use made by CCOs of the User Guide is in planning sessions (57%). CCOs noted that they use the User Guide to create individualised supervision plans, and to decide the most appropriate ways to deliver exercises to offenders. Several interviewees explained that effective planning and tailoring of supervision activities using the PGI is helpful to creating engaging and, ultimately, effective supervision.

Figure 7 Different uses of PGI User Guide by CCOs (n=56)



Many interviewees (54%) read the guide as a way to learn about different exercises, aiming to become familiar with as many of the exercises as they could. CCOs often saw this as a way of developing their ‘toolbox’ of PGI exercises, enabling them to better tailor exercises to the immediate needs of the offender on an ad-hoc basis.

“Ultimately, I think the thing that I’ve found most useful in adopting the PGI is, when I have some quiet time, having a flip through of what the exercises are looking for, what kind of thoughts you’re trying to instil in people, and then finding a way to do that that feels natural.” -I32

Some CCOs (20%) mentioned that they refer to the PGI User Guide as a guide during their sessions with offenders to ensure that they delivered exercises as intended, especially with exercises they are not very familiar with. A small number of CCOs (9%) also mentioned that they refer to the User Guide while reporting on their exercises to ensure that the case notes they write up include all of the information necessary from the exercises/discussion.

5.3 Office discussions

Just over two thirds of all interviewees reported that they found discussions with colleagues to be a helpful way of developing their knowledge and confidence in delivering PGI exercises to offenders. The vast majority of these focused on informal discussions with management (especially Unit Leaders) and other colleagues at their office.

Interviewees explained that they would simply ask staff around them who they saw as knowledgeable in regards to the PGI. Interviewees reported that these discussions were a common way for them to learn about ways to practically and effectively deliver different PGI exercises. Interviewees often noted that they asked colleagues and managers about specific issues they’d had during sessions, or questions that arose while they were planning future sessions.

“...if there’s something I’m not 100 per cent sure of I’m not backward in going and asking the question. Because if they’ve been there and they’ve got it - like there’s some people in the office who I would say would be close to gurus of PGIs. There’s some people I wouldn’t go and ask.” -I43

Several interviewees noted that they appreciated formal facilitated discussions about PGI practice that happened in their office, generally as part of regular staff and team meetings.

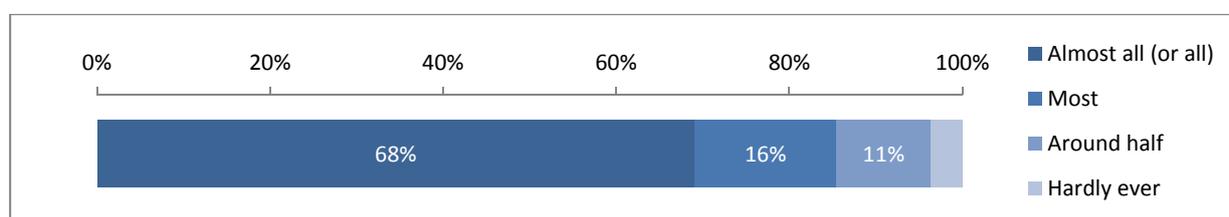
6 ROUTINE DELIVERY OF PGI CONTENT

In their interviews, CCOs discussed the ways in which they currently use the PGI and the considerations affecting their choices in different situations. This includes the different exercises they use, as well as the ways in which they deliver these exercises to different offenders and the situations in which they do so.

6.1 Delivery of PGI exercises

Interviewees were asked to self-assess the extent to which they use PGI exercises as part of supervision sessions with offenders. Overall, almost all stated that they used PGI exercises in around half or more of their sessions with clients, with the vast majority using them extensively. As shown in Figure 8, more than two thirds stated that they used the PGI with offenders in all or almost all of their sessions with offenders.

Figure 8 PGI Use in sessions (n=48)⁹



6.1.1 Delivery of PGI exercises in crisis situations

One common situation in which many interviewees felt it might not be appropriate to deliver PGI exercises was when offenders presented at sessions in crisis. Nearly one quarter of all interviewees felt that they could not use a PGI exercise in such a situation. These interviewees generally felt that they could not force an offender facing a serious issue to focus on an exercise aimed at changing their behaviour, with some stating that doing so would actually be counter-productive to the individual and to their relationship with them.

More interviewees (39%), on the other hand, noted that they would still use a PGI exercise in the context of a crisis situation, with the wide majority of these explaining that they are aware of particular PGI exercises that would be appropriate to help offenders with crisis issues. CCOs often associated being able to use a PGI in such a situation with having a good overall knowledge of PGI exercises and developing a 'toolbox' of PGI exercises appropriate for different offender needs. Several noted that they are able to ensure that they can do a PGI exercise with an offender even when they are in crisis by separating the PGI exercise from the rest of the session, which will likely focus on dealing with the crisis.

A total of 16% of interviewees described both situations in which they could use a PGI exercise to help an offender in crisis and situations in which this would not be appropriate. These interviewees generally saw the difference between the two as being the magnitude of the crisis and the urgency of the practical support needed.

⁹ Where interviewees provided numbers, they were categorised according to the following cutoffs: 'Almost all (or all)'=86%-100%; 'Most'=61%-85%; 'Around half'=41%-60%; 'Hardly ever'=<40%.

“Our offenders inherently are in some form of crisis. Now medium and above, who we generally deal with, they're in a level of crisis. Now if it's an acute crisis because, you know, they've just been kicked out of home or they're going through a psychotic episode, the PGI is not the appropriate tool to be using for that interview. We have to do other things. ...if it's a minor crisis because they've lapsed and they're scared they're going to go to gaol because we're going to breach them back to the parole authority... well the PGI is actually a really excellent tool to use because we can acknowledge that process but we can then focus on, all right, well how can we resolve this issue.”

-42

6.1.2 Decisions on which modules and exercises to use with offenders

In discussing the types of PGI modules and exercises that they used most and least, interviewees typically reported that they decide which to use based on how relevant the issue covered in the module or exercise is to the specific offender they are currently working with. Sometimes this is based on the explicit requests of offenders (when they are involved in the planning of their supervision), but often this is based on their understanding of the offender's needs, as per the case planning process outlined in the PGI User Guide.

A large number of interviewees mentioned that the structure of the worksheet associated with an exercise substantially affects their interest in using it – these CCOs often explained that they will rarely use an exercise with a worksheet that is unclear or unattractive (several gave the example of exercise 3.2).

A similar proportion of CCOs mentioned that they are not familiar with all exercises, and as a result are only likely to use exercises they have experience with. Several interviewees noted that receiving effective and comprehensive training has helped them to expand their repertoire of exercises. Many such CCOs were those who more often delivered exercises as an interaction with the offender rather than using a worksheet (see section 6.1.4). They explained that it is helpful in such a situation to know the contents of the exercise well so as to ensure that conversations progress more naturally.

“I must admit that I have mainly used the first ones and then those ones I mentioned, and some of them I haven't really looked too much at yet. I still --I'm still evolving.”

-126

6.1.3 Modules and exercises used most and least

Interviewees were asked which modules (excluding exercises 1.1 and 1.2, which are generally mandatory) they have tended to use most and least in their current practice, and why. As shown in Figure 9 below, the most commonly mentioned module was #2 (“Achieving goals”), with many interviewees noting that they use the module with most of their supervisees as part of the initial planning stage of supervision in order to help them (and the offender) assess what they would like to achieve from supervision.

“That short and the long-term goals, I pretty much do with everyone. Because I think at the start it's a way of setting... Another way of trying to sort of set it in their mind that...we're here now. Especially blokes on parole where you can say to them ‘mate, do you reckon you're done with gaol?’, ‘Oh, mate, I'm over it, you know?’ So, you go ‘okay, well, what are we going to do? What do you need to do to make sure that you are done with gaol?’”

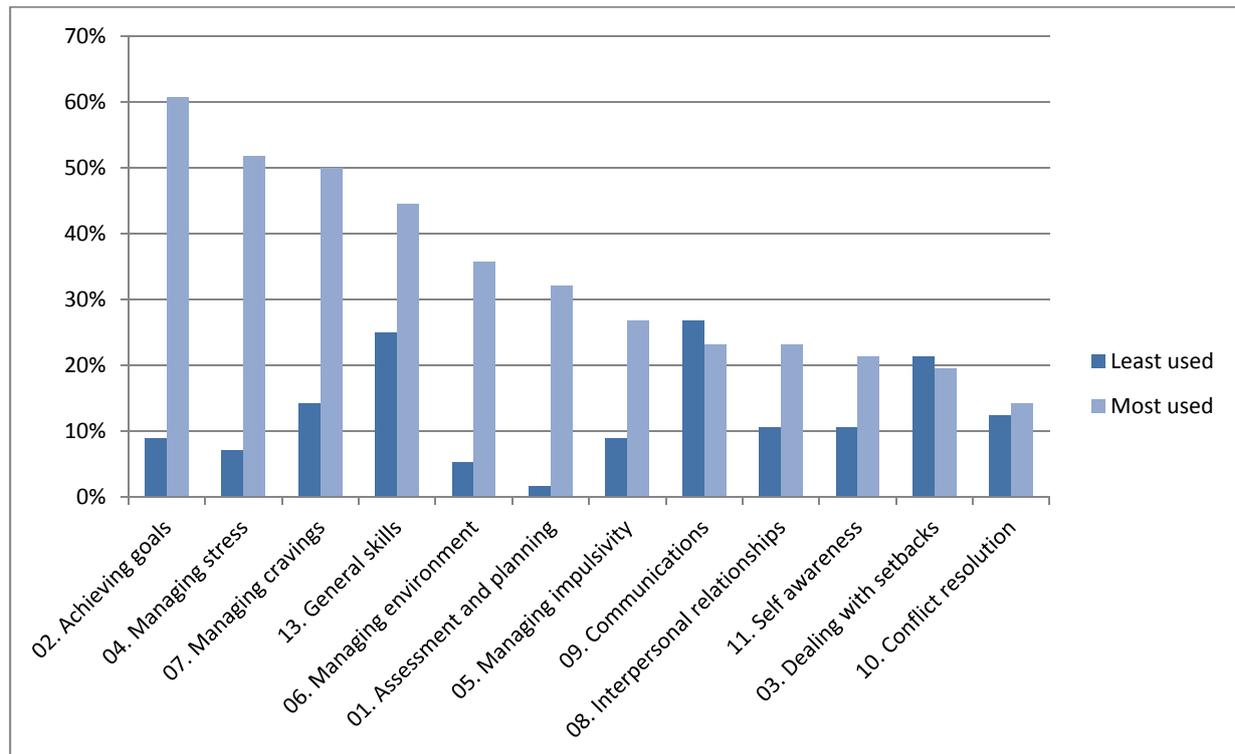
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Two other modules mentioned as being used frequently by around half of interviewees each were #4 (“Managing stress” – 52%) and #7 (“Managing cravings” – 50%). Both were mentioned as ways of helping offenders understand and control factors that impact their behaviour. They were both noted as particularly helpful by over 60% of CCOs supervising offenders in the community, with many mentioning they help deal with problematic behaviours that a large proportion of offenders deal with. Several interviewees said they found the cravings log particularly helpful and used it often with offenders with drug and alcohol issues.

Many CCOs noted that they used exercises in Module #13 (“General skills”) often. However a substantial proportion also noted they used such exercises very little. This is likely due to the mix of exercises in the module. Nearly half of all CCOs mentioned that they used Progress Review (13.2) with offenders, with many interviewees saying that they used the exercise multiple times with each offender in order to emphasise to offenders the progress they’ve made in supervision and explaining that this had been helpful in encouraging offenders to engage in supervision in an ongoing manner.

On the other hand, the module was also listed by one quarter of all interviewees as one of those they use the least, mainly due to exercise 13.3 (“Practicing mindfulness”), which many interviewees felt would not be appreciated by their supervisees and would not encourage engagement.

Figure 9 Non-mandatory modules noted by interviewees as most used and least used¹⁰, (n=56)



Only two modules were listed by more people as one of their least used than as one of their most used: #3 (“Dealing with setbacks”) and #9 (“Communications”). A small number of interviewees elaborated that the module of interest was not relevant to the needs of their supervisees or that they were simply unfamiliar with it and had not tried it out.

Several interviewees did note that they felt that module #3 (“Dealing with setbacks”) used negative language, which could emphasise poor behaviour and cement an unhelpful attitude towards mistakes. Several specifically mentioned the confusing structure of the ‘Redefining Failure’ worksheet (3.2), which, they felt, discouraged them, and offenders, from using the module.

“I’m never sure if to use it because I don’t like formalising some hiccups as real setbacks.”

-17

¹⁰ Excluding exercises 1.1 and 1.2

6.1.4 Worksheets

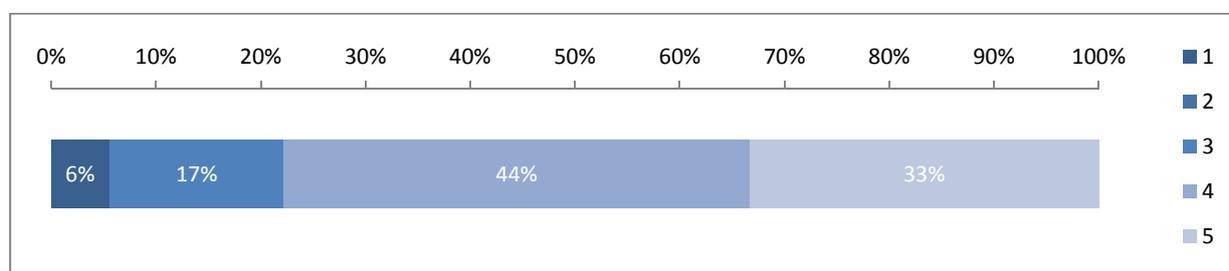
Interviewees who discussed their use of physical worksheets in PGI supervision sessions used them to varying degrees, though worksheets were generally used quite heavily. As outlined in Figure 10 below, nearly three quarters of interviewees who discussed this noted that they use a worksheet in at least half of sessions with offenders, with 44% stating that they almost always use a worksheet. The remaining 28% rarely used worksheets, commonly delivering sessions verbally.

Figure 10 Usage of Worksheets with PGI exercises in supervision sessions (n=43)



Interviewees rated the worksheets as helpful overall, with more than three quarters giving them a rating of 4 out of 5 or higher¹¹. Respondents saw a variety of benefits in the worksheets, most commonly noting that they were helpful as a clear and concrete way of explaining the purpose and structure of an exercise. Other interviewees saw the worksheets as valuable guides for their delivery of exercises, especially when they are not very familiar with the exercise. Several noted that having a written version of the exercise helps keep sessions on topic, preventing offenders from discussing unrelated topics by providing supervisors and offenders with a concrete plan to focus on.

Figure 11 Rating of usefulness of worksheets (n=54)



Many interviewees noted that they prefer to directly use worksheets with offenders as they are the core of the PGI exercises. In discussing their considerations regarding when to use or not use a worksheet with an offender, interviewees, however, generally focused on factors affecting the responsivity of the offenders to the PGI exercises.

One such factor was the offender's level of education and literacy, which interviewees often stated was important to both their ability to understand the written exercise and their likely reaction to being presented with a written exercise. Many interviewees noted that some offenders become defensive or resistant when they see a worksheet as it feels to them like a test of their knowledge, which is especially troubling for them if they had difficulty at school. Interviewees often noted that this kind of reaction was particularly common

¹¹ Based on a scale of 1=not useful at all, 5=very useful

among offenders who had had previous experience with community supervision as they feel that this is an onerous new condition of supervision.

"...I've got a couple of people who are really intimidated by having a piece of paper there and they're usually the ones who are more of a low cognitive function or they've got an aversion to school type activity. So preparing for that I make sure I know the questions before going in and just have a general discussion around the questions without a worksheet."

-154

More than three quarters of interviewees discussed ways in which they use physical worksheets with offenders to support supervision sessions. Interviewees generally associated different ways of using the worksheets to efforts to accommodate the needs and interests of the offender they are working with.

Around two in five of these interviewees stated that they completed the worksheet for the offender while discussing the questions and issues raised in it. One third also noted that they often get offenders to at least attempt to fill in the worksheet themselves. Around one quarter of interviewees noted that they do not actually fill in the worksheet, but rather use it as a guide during their conversations with offenders. A similar proportion noted that they sometimes give the offender the worksheet to complete at home and return at the next session.

Around three quarters of interviewees also discussed how they deliver PGI exercises when they do not bring a worksheet into the session. They generally stated that they did so as informal conversations with the offender, based on the questions raised in PGI exercises. As discussed by many interviewees, a common consideration was the importance of preventing the supervision session from feeling like a formal exercise. This was particularly important as many interviewees noted that they generally use this method of delivery in situations where offenders are uncomfortable or fail to engage with formal exercises involving worksheets. They often explained that the aim of this method of delivery is to make the session feel similar to a traditional supervision session they are familiar with, while still having the impact of the exercise.

A smaller proportion of interviewees (25%) noted that they do not use the PGI as direct exercises, but rather as inspiration for a discussion. These discussions are often not structured to follow the questions in the exercises, but rather touch on issues covered in the different modules, influenced by the activities and the prompts for discussion in the exercises. Interviewees explained that this is a way of working that is more natural to them and to many offenders, and is a good way of ensuring that regular sessions also include behaviour change elements.

7 PAROLE UNITS AND THE PGI

As discussed in section 2.2., a substantial minority (23%) of the sample worked in Parole Units, supervising offenders in custodial settings before their release. Parole Unit officers generally write pre-release reports for some offenders and help offenders prepare for their release with information about the process they will go through. They also collect information about the offender's needs and review the situation into which offenders will be released, identifying family supports and other social services that could help create a stable pro-social environment for them.

Although they work with offenders in a somewhat similar way to CCOs in the community, Parole Unit officers work in a substantially different context, and face some unique challenges. As a result it is possible that Parole Unit officers have substantially different perceptions of the PGI and its implementation compared to other staff. While it is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive comparison of results between Parole Unit and other staff, the following section outlines key observations about some of the unique patterns of responses given by the subset of the sample who were acting as Parole Unit officers at the time of study.

Many Parole Unit officers felt that training and support for them was considered an 'afterthought'. They felt that any training and support provided was done so without consideration for their unique needs. Newly hired interviewees noted that the training they received at the BFCSA generally did not cover any issues specific to delivery in a custodial setting. Parole Unit staff in several offices noted that the Practice Managers who supported them did not have the experience and knowledge necessary to provide particularly helpful support covering pre-release supervision.

Parole Unit interviewees commonly described the sessions they have with offenders as short, semi-formal and lacking in privacy. Many such officers commonly explained that they often lack access to the physical infrastructure in prisons (e.g. office, tables and chairs) to effectively deliver the PGI exercises to offenders. Some also noted that they generally had very little time with offenders (few, short meetings before release) during which they could develop a rapport and conduct exercises. As a result they commonly expressed beliefs that sessions were not conducive to effective delivery of a serious behaviour change intervention.

"We don't have interview rooms all the time, depending on what wing you'll go to. So you'll be standing...at a grill gate trying to lean on something and write. So you've got no [privacy] and all the other inmates are around. It's a bit hard to do one. "

-150

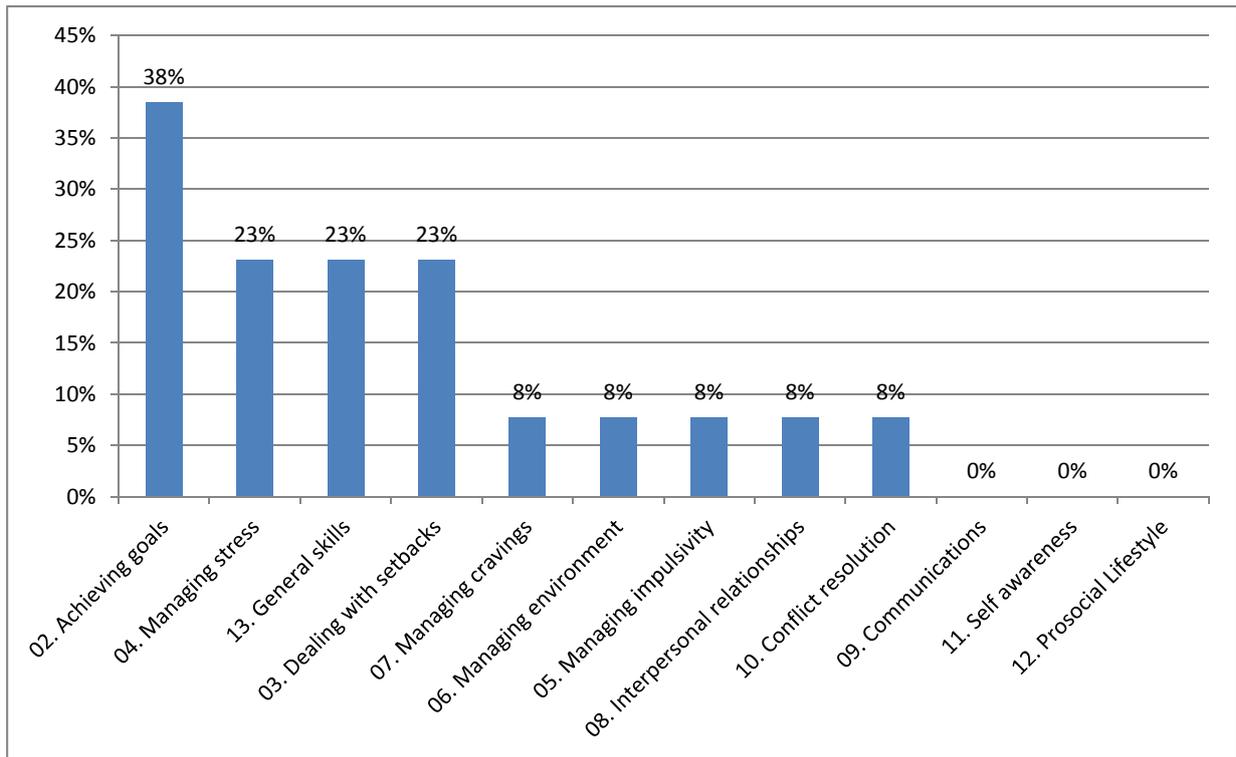
In addition, many Parole Unit interviewees felt that a large proportion of PGI exercises are not relevant to the custodial context in which offenders live. This is recognised in administration of the PGI, with Parole Unit officers only required to deliver at least one PGI exercise to 80% of offenders they see face-to-face within the month prior to their release (in most cases the specialised 1.1.2 'Getting Out on Parole')¹². Parole Unit officers are also required to deliver Offence Mapping (exercise 1.2) to offenders released on the orders of the State Parole Authority¹³.

Despite this, some Parole Unit officers did see their role in providing behaviour change interventions to offenders about to be released from custody. Such officers noted that they deliver a wide variety of PGI exercises where appropriate and possible, with some modules being used by up to nearly 40% of Parole Unit officers (see Figure 12 below).

¹² Assistant Commissioner's Memorandum 2017/11

¹³ Assistant Commissioner's Memorandum 2017/06

Figure 12 Self-reported use of non-compulsory PGI Modules by Parole Unit officers (n=13)



8 IMPACT OF THE PGI IN CCO OPERATIONS

8.1 Positive

Interviewees felt that using PGI exercises with offenders had a variety of different benefits, both in terms of the impact of supervision on the offender and in terms of their ability to deliver effective interventions.

- **Offenders' responses to the exercises** (41%). Many Interviewees noted that they have been encouraged by seeing their supervisees engage with the exercises and even have important realisations about their behaviour and thinking during sessions. Furthermore, some mentioned that they were excited to observe evidence of progress offenders made over the course of their supervision, in terms of behaviour change.
- **The PGI is a good guide for action** (29%) when the interviewee does not know what to do with an offender. As many interviewees are not trained as counsellors or psychologists, they were happy to receive detailed instructions for exercises with clearly explained rationales and connections to other programs. Interviewees often noted that this made it easier to deliver helpful supervision that is appropriate to the needs of a variety of different offenders, in a variety of different situations.
- **PGI exercises helped CCOs keep offenders focused** (18%) on important issues during sessions. They explained that offenders often went off track during supervision discussions, especially when they did not want to engage in the difficult self-reflection that supervisors tried to encourage. Many interviewees were very happy to have a concrete activity to point to that would help keep offenders' focus on the issue at hand.
- **Learned about, or became more aware of, CBT** (13%). Interviewees felt that using, and learning about the PGI, has helped them understand CBT and its use with offenders. Several interviewees noted that they understood that they had been unknowingly doing activities with offenders that were CBT, but that the PGI helped them formalise and improve this. This was not mentioned by Parole Unit CCOs, possibly due to the fact that they are less likely to use PGI exercises as behaviour-change interventions with offenders.
- **The PGI provides new skills and options for support** (9%) that CCOs would otherwise not have been able to provide to offenders. Several interviewees emphasised the benefit to their professional development.

8.2 Mixed

Interviewees identified several different, yet related, ways in which using the PGI can affect their work with offenders in both positive and negative ways. These were commonly issues that were seen as positive by some and negative by others.

- Nearly one third of interviewees noted that the PGI provides **increased consistency** in supervision, typically in relation to the structured nature of PGI exercises. This means that offenders generally receive thematically and even stylistically consistent support over the course of their supervision, whether they have the same CCO or not. This was often positively compared to the individual and ad-hoc nature of much of the support provided to offenders previously.

- One quarter of all interviewees mentioned that the PGI exercises represent a greater **formalisation of the activities of supervision**. Many such interviewees argued that they were already doing much of what is the focus of PGI exercises, such as CBT and activities aimed at exploring the roots of offending behaviours and changing them. They felt that the main difference between what they were doing and the supervision offered by PGI exercises is that PGI exercises offered more formal activities, encouraging CCOs to follow detailed instructions. Several interviewees noted the importance of ensuring that structure and formalisation do not make the support impersonal or ‘robotic’. They often discussed the concern that CCOs would provide the same supervision to different offenders regardless of their needs and responsivity factors.

8.3 Negative

Interviewees mentioned several aspects of the introduction of the PGI that were unhelpful to their work with offenders. These included both issues inherent to the PGI and issues caused by the implementation process and subsequent expectations of CCOs.

- **Practical problems in the early phases of the program** (45%) of PGI in different offices and regions, especially during the early stages of implementation. Many interviewees felt that there was a lack of training, support and guidance provided to them before the appointment of Practice Managers, even when they were already required to deliver PGI exercises in supervision. Furthermore, some interviewees felt that there was a lack of clarity and consistency in instructions provided for how and when to use, and record the usage of, PGI exercises with offenders. Several felt that this led to a feeling of “moving goal posts.”
- **The focus on KPIs** (43%), which interviewees felt had created consternation among CCOs due to the frequent fear of falling foul of requirements. Furthermore, many felt that it created perverse incentives, encouraging CCOs to deliver exercises even when not appropriate due a focus on quantity of delivery rather than quality of supervision. Though much less than for community unit CCOs, this was still an issue for a substantial proportion of Parole Unit CCOs (23%) despite the lower PGI delivery requirements that they have.
- **The PGI takes more time** (25%) in several ways, and interviewees felt that these are not recognised by management with an appropriate reduction in their caseload. Interviewees noted that effectively delivering the PGI requires more time spent in planning the session, in delivering the exercise to the offender, and in recording the session. Furthermore, some mentioned that learning how to use the PGI required more time spent in training and professional development. Interviewees felt that this could impact on their perception of time pressure and consequently on the quality of support provided to offenders.
- **The attitude of offenders** (18%), which interviewees mentioned made getting them to engage with PGI exercises difficult. Interviewees felt that many offenders, especially those who have previously engaged in community supervision, were resistant to behaviour change interventions (and particularly to more formal exercises) as part of their supervision.
- **PGI exercises cover issues that CCOs are not qualified to deal with** (14%), which, interviewees suggested, could lead to adverse psychological and behavioural impacts of some offenders.

8.4 Suggestions for improvement

CCOs made suggestions for changes that could help them to effectively deliver supervision to offenders using the PGI and continue with best practice in the future.

- **Improvements in training and support provided to CCOs (48%)** aimed at ensuring effective delivery of PGI. Most suggestions focused on providing more practical training on how to deliver PGI exercises, including role-playing, modelling, and watching videos of best practice. Others wanted more training in CBT and other basic counselling skills to scaffold their development in delivering behaviour change interventions. Some just suggested providing more training overall.
- **Enhancements to the PGI itself (39%)**, such as expansion of modules to cover more issues or provide more exercises for each issue. Several interviewees suggested making the PGI a regularly expanding document, with new exercises being added regularly to meet the changing needs of offenders and CCOs, and to prevent repeating of exercises.
- **Reduce focus on the KPIs (21%)** and the expectations of CCOs delivering exercises. Interviewees felt that this could help make CCOs more comfortable with the PGI, and remove what many saw as a potentially perverse incentive for CCOs to prioritise quantity of delivery over quality.
- **Changes to the recommended delivery style (14%)**, mostly focusing on the need for less prescriptive exercises, and encouraging more conversational delivery as opposed to pen-and-paper worksheets.
- **Improvements to physical facilities and practical issues (13%)**, mostly recommended by Parole Unit staff, who often felt that additional private office spaces in which to deliver supervision would enable them to more effectively deliver PGI exercises. Several interviewees recommended better recognising the additional time that delivering PGIs requires of them and reducing their caseload.

9 DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to examine Community Corrections officers' perspectives on the implementation of the new PGI model of offender supervision. A sample of 56 staff from Community Corrections offices across NSW were surveyed using a semi-structured interview format. Content analysis of responses derived a number of insights and themes into the implementation and ongoing delivery of the PGI, which will be discussed in the following sections.

9.1 Model implementation and the role of Practice Managers

Feedback received from CCOs indicated that the staggered introduction of the PGI across multiple stages was difficult for many staff and may have increased initial confusion and resistance. While this approach was ostensibly intended to allow CCOs time to become familiar with the model, it appears that resistance may have been exacerbated by exposure to PGI material in the absence of comprehensive formal training.

Both new and existing CCOs felt that the training they received during the first phase of the introduction of the PGI was limited, and did not provide them with sufficient practical instruction to deliver the PGI effectively. A potential implication of this is that existing supervision and reporting lines within Community Corrections offices, or access to written resources such as the CCO Handbook, were not sufficient to organically promote the skills development that officers felt were required for delivery of the PGI. Limitations to early training and skills development may have led to a relatively narrow use and understanding of the PGI during initial periods, and ultimately contributed to delays in the extent to which the model may be expected to realise effects on offender supervision outcomes.

It appears, however, that the subsequent implementation of a team of Practice Managers has provided critical support to supervising officers and contributed to both fundamental and continuous skills development. Other models of behaviour change focused service delivery to offenders under community based supervision have similarly emphasised the importance of ongoing clinical support (e.g. Bonta et al., 2013). In the current study, CCOs frequently reported that Practice Managers' support helped them gain a practical understanding of the PGI, and gave many of them greater confidence in their ability to incorporate exercises into their supervision sessions with offenders. For the bulk of CCOs, this helped counteract the initial negative associations with the PGI over the course of 2017. This highlights the importance of consistent and comprehensive support to enabling effective use of a new method of service delivery.

9.2 Fidelity versus flexibility in service delivery

By the time of interview most staff had developed increasing perceptions of the utility of the PGI as an approach to supervising offenders in the community, and appear to have accepted the model as part of business as usual operations within Community Corrections. This was evident from the high level of reported usage of the PGI in sessions and experience of a wide range of exercises and worksheets. There were indications that the multiple modules and exercises were used with varying frequency and were perceived to have varying utility by many officers (see also Chong et al., 2018). While more manualised module content has been successfully incorporated into other models of community supervision (e.g. Bruce & Hollin, 2009; Pearson et al., 2011), the results of this study suggest that such a model may require continued review and updating of content to reflect the needs and usages of staff.

An additional complexity of the PGI model that emerged from interviewees' responses related to the tension between needs to maintain a degree of fidelity to the manualised content of the exercises, and needs for flexibility to ensure that exercises are aligned with offenders' responsivity factors as well as the officer's supervisory style. Interviewees described successful application of PGI content with varying degrees of

flexibility in terms of use of written worksheets or more verbal or other informal analogues, and often expressed beliefs that the model was most impactful when they had the opportunity to choose not only the exercise that was appropriate to the needs of interviewees, but also the delivery method that would best suit their individual interaction style and responsivity factors¹⁴. This is aligned with procedures outlined in the PGI User Guide, which highlights the importance of considering the responsivity factors of the offender as well as their criminogenic needs¹⁵.

Further, a substantial minority of interviewees reported highly flexible perceptions of the PGI, viewing it as a guide or set of ideas for intervention that can be utilised in any way they see as appropriate. Reports that the PGI provided general opportunities to learn about important aspects of intervention with offenders and behaviour change techniques such as CBT were common, and some CCOs described the PGI primarily as a source of information about relevant criminogenic needs or other intervention themes that could then be raised in discussions with offenders. Several CCOs also implied that they made case notes based on the broad correspondence between what they discussed with offenders during the session and the content of similar modules in the PGI User Guide. It appears that for many CCOs there remains a degree of subjectivity as to whether the PGI is a toolkit of exercises for faithful delivery to offenders or more broadly a means of improving officers' individual skills as agents of change. This has implications for the integrity of the PGI as a system-wide intervention and may contribute to variance in the relationship between service delivery and offender outcomes.

It is noted, however, that most CCOs gave positive feedback about the level of flexibility incorporated into policies and procedures surrounding the PGI, as evidenced by the fact that the majority deliver exercises (either with or without worksheets) as instructed by the manualised guidelines. Furthermore, most CCOs' requests for additional training focused on the need for greater knowledge of the existing structures and content of PGI exercises to enable effective targeting to the needs of offenders.

9.3 Variation in the roles and responsibilities of officers

This report largely describes the results of interview responses among sampled Community Corrections staff in aggregate, and it was beyond the scope of the study to make exhaustive comparisons across the differing roles and responsibilities of officers. However, over the course of analysis it was observed that staff from Parole Units, who engage custody-based offenders in reintegration and case planning in advance of their release into the community, tended to give different patterns of responses compared to other interviewees. In particular, Parole Unit staff appeared to report substantially narrower use of the PGI than that made by officers working with offenders in the community. This was generally related to their more negative views of the applicability of the PGI to the unique challenges and context of their sessions with offenders in custody. Parole Unit staff were similarly observed to have more negative views of the training and ongoing support they receive, generally viewing it as not effectively covering the issues they face in delivering PGI exercises to offenders in custody.

While development of intervention delivery skills may be considered a widely applicable component of models that aim to promote the role of supervising officers as agents of change (e.g. Bonta et al., 2013), more manualised approaches, focusing on ready-developed content such as PGI exercises may be less generalisable across contexts. The pattern of responses from interviewees suggests that system-wide implementation of models such as the PGI may benefit from tailored training and support, as well as policies recognising differential use according to staff roles, responsibilities and environments.

¹⁴ See discussion of use of worksheets in section 6.1.4 and of the need to tailor exercises to offenders in crisis in section 6.1.1.

¹⁵ Practice Guide for Intervention, p17.

9.4 Limitations

Some limitations of the study are noted. As previously mentioned, this study employed a convenience sampling method to access Community Corrections officers at a range of sites across NSW. Interviewees both participated in the study voluntarily and were selected from identified offices that had a minimum number of suitable staff. In the absence of randomisation the results may not be interpreted as representative of the views and experience of all CCOs; for example, considering the reported importance of formal and informal support mechanisms in continuing professional development it is possible that perceptions of the PGI would differ among CCOs at Community Corrections offices with small staff numbers. In this regard the results may be best interpreted as indicative of common narratives among a range of differing groups of CCOs.

In addition, interviews were conducted at a substantial interval (16-17 months) following the initial introduction of the PGI to Community Corrections. This methodology was intended to provide sufficient time for staff to both experience the implementation of the PGI and to incorporate the model into business as usual operations, although was also dependent on administrative factors. Our approach may have had an influence on the validity of interviewees' recollections, particularly in relation to the early phases of introduction of the model. The interviewer made efforts to address this by confirming details with interviewees where possible and appropriate. However, it is acknowledged that as a result of the timing of the interviews some details may have been misremembered or misinterpreted by staff.

Finally, it is noted that the results of this study represent the subjective perceptions of interviewed staff and may not be interpreted as objective indicators of model operations or performance. For example, CCOs' estimates of how frequently they applied PGI exercises with offenders may be better understood in the context of aggregate operational data recorded at the conclusion of each session. Subsequent evaluations of the PGI intend to complement the findings of this report by leveraging quantitative data streams produced as part of delivery of the model.

9.5 Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that following a challenging initial transition phase, the PGI model has had widespread uptake by Community Corrections staff and become increasingly understood and applied as a core component of supervision of offenders in the community, with the possible exception of officers who operate under specialist conditions such as those in Parole Units. The introduction of Practice Managers as a means of continuing quality assurance and professional development appears to have been critical to addressing early limitations to the effectiveness of training, and to increasing officers' confidence and skills in delivery of the PGI. While interviewees' feedback about the role of Practice Managers underscores the value of providing support throughout all stages of a systematic reform such as the PGI, many staff also emphasised the value of informal avenues such as review of handbooks and consultation between colleagues as means of ensuring continuing development and best practice.

Findings from this study also indicated that more than a year following the implementation of the new model there continues to be variance in perceptions of the central purpose and utility of the PGI, either as a manual of exercises for CCOs to adhere to, or a more broadly defined intervention aimed at improving CCOs' understanding of criminogenic needs and professional capabilities in addressing those needs. Different interpretations of this purpose across CCOs may lead to substantially different ways of delivering PGI exercises. The results indicated that while some officers currently apply the PGI as a more general professional development tool and thematic guide, most interviewees tended to endorse the PGI as a suite of specified interventions for use with offenders.

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