

Forensic Mental Health Insider

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Agency Spotlight: The Paragon Group LLC

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What types of services does The Paragon Group provide for their clients?

At the Paragon Group, we strive to promote and advance evidence-based practices in the arena of criminal justice. To that end, our services range from speaking engagements to assessment training, up to program design. Most criminal justice agencies, and even some quasi-CJ agencies who may serve justice related clientele, are at least familiar with the principles of risk, need and responsivity. The R-N-R model of supervision is the cornerstone of most correctional agencies who are endeavoring to embrace evidence-based practices. That model starts with good assessment. We can train staff in the use of the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory, which is one of the most widely used assessment tools in use in corrections today. In fact, for agencies wanting to build training capacity, we can train their current LS/CMI assessors to become trainers themselves. What really sets us apart though is our acumen around the emerging theories of desistance. That is truly the next frontier when it comes to EBP in Corrections and those agencies trying to provide services to justice involved individuals. We have given introductory presentations on this topic to agencies ranging from Federal probation to local non-profits. If folks like what they hear, we also have experience with program design. We are currently working with a substance abuse treatment provider, who's community-based programs serve those coming out of the CJ system. To their credit, they had previously embraced the principles of Risk-Need-Responsivity in their program design. However, they contacted the Paragon Group to augment their services to align with the emerging desistance models.

Historically, the focus in criminal justice and particularly corrections has been on figuring out how folks started down the pathway of delinquency. The thought being, if we could figure out those pathways into crime, we could address those variables and reduce the odds of offending. For example, if it is determined via assessment that an individual is at risk to re-offend due to need in the areas of employment, or substance abuse, education or their peer group, those become targets of change. And that approach has served us well. Even more so for agencies that adhere to accurate assessment protocols and evidence-based case management strategies, such as the use of cognitive behavioral interventions. Again though, the focus has been on those reasons why folks entered into and sustain a life of crime. The desistance theorists take a much different approach. They had the brilliant idea of examining why folks exit, or desist from, a life of crime. And this is where it gets really interesting. One would think that the reason why folks leave a criminal lifestyle is merely the absence of those identified risk factors...but that is not entirely the case. What the research shows is that while there is some overlap, such as employment and peer group, there are also unique variables. Those include things such as agency, self-efficacy, and the all-important identity transformation. Our current correctional approach is very risk averse, and I would contend too focused on risk suppression and labeling. What appeals to me about the desistance approach is that it is all about augmenting human capital and the development of a new pro social identity. We understand and appreciate both sides of that coin at The Paragon Group and take that holistic understanding into our program design for our clients.

You mentioned desistance earlier...say more about that if you would.

Tell us about your background. What led you to this point of your career?

After graduate school I migrated south and

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spent a few years working the Florida Department of Corrections as a probation officer. I eventually returned to my home state of Minnesota, where I continue to be employed in the field of corrections. I saw where the field was going as to evidence-based practices and dove in headfirst. I realized that containment was not the answer. We are never going to incarcerate our way out of the crime problem. As a result, I am now a Master Trainer of the Level of Service Case Management Inventory, or LS/CMI. That really keeps me anchored and in tune with R-N-R. I am a motivational interviewing trainer and I facilitate a variety of cognitive behavioral intervention programs. Understating the importance of accurate assessment, I reached out to one of the leading thinkers in the field of desistance, Dr. Ralph Serin of Carleton University in Canada. Dr. Serin has developed various assessment tools to measure desistance correlates. I am proud to call Dr. Serin a mentor in the field of desistance and am thrilled to continue to collaborate with him as to desistance scales and interventions. For the past twenty years or so, I have taught CJ courses at two local universities, which of course dovetails nicely with my zeal for EBP and the latest and greatest trends. The students don't always get my jokes, but I tell my wife it's the closest I'll ever come to attaining my dream of becoming a stand-up comic.

For those who are intrigued and wish to learn more, what advice would you give them?

*Reach out to me of course, but if you like, I would also suggest listening to our podcast. The Paragon Group produces a podcast, *The Criminologists*, which is currently in its second season. My co-host Shawn Trusten and I talk all things criminology, but we don't get too heavy and sprinkle in just the right amount of irreverence. For those who prefer a more traditional approach, all of my publications as to RNR, Desistance, and evidence-based practices can be found at our website, www.theparagongroupllc.com. You can contact us through our website as well.*

have ranged from Federal Probation to local for profit and non-profit agencies. His career in Corrections spans over 30 years. He has extensive experience training and facilitating a variety of Evidence Based Practices ranging from Cognitive Skills programs, Motivational Interviewing, and Risk Assessment. He is a Master Trainer of the Level of Services/Case Management Inventory and trainer of the Dynamic Risk Assessment for Offender Reentry tool. Mr. Arvidson has been an adjunct faculty member at Concordia University and Metropolitan State University since 2000, where he teaches a number of graduate and undergraduate level Criminal Justice courses. Mr. Arvidson received both his B.A. and M.S. degrees from St. Cloud State University in the discipline of Criminal Justice Administration. He also attained a Graduate Certificate in Project Management from Metropolitan State University. He currently serves as member of Concordia University's Criminal Justice Executive Advisory Board. Mr. Arvidson is co-host of *The Criminologists* podcast.

Author Biography

Joseph Arvidson, MS, GCERT, is Executive Director of The Paragon Group, LLC. Their scope of services includes speaking engagements, training and consulting as to RNR and desistance-based models. Mr. Arvidson's training and consulting clientele