Strengthening Supervision for Safer Communities

Modern software helps officers handle growing caseloads and improve outcomes.

Introduction

As justice systems focus on alternatives to incarceration, they are also seeking ways to address staff shortages that are contributing to record caseloads. Supervision software helps agencies streamline pretrial, probation and parole processes to improve outcomes and protect communities.

"Supervision personnel have a really hard job caring for the community and managing people who they want to be successful," says Jack Martin, a Tyler Technologies client executive and former director of the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice in Nevada. "The technology keeps families together, reduces jail time and allows staff to make better, more informed decisions."

Challenges and Solutions

From pretrial and juvenile justice to probation and parole, supervision has a common goal: to reduce long-term incarceration and keep people in the justice system connected to their families and communities. But this work comes with growing challenges. For example, the average time adults remain incarcerated has increased to 33 days in 2021, compared to 28 days in 2020 and 23 days in 2011.[1]

At the same time, a focus on transparency in the justice system requires more — and more consistent — data. This presents a hurdle in a field where recordkeeping is often manual or spread across multiple systems. "If you don't have good clean data, you have a problem," Martin says.

Modern supervision software helps officers manage growing caseloads, simplify recordkeeping and automate monitoring. These systems determine the potential risks for individuals using validated assessment tools. Officers can focus on the cases that need the most attention while monitoring routine offenders electronically with bracelets and other tracking devices. Mobile applications let personnel spend more time in their community instead of manually entering case notes into multiple systems, according to Martin. "These things really make a difference when you're handling a hundred cases or more," he says.

Data collected during every step of the case management process can be aggregated to support decisions about resource allocation. For example, data helped the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice pinpoint concentrations of nonviolent misdemeanors in the county. The department used that information to create community centers that proactively reduced caseloads.

Clark County, Nevada:
Taking Away the Nonsense

At the beginning of his career in supervision, Jack Martin's case management system was a paper notebook and a list of phone numbers. "I remember standing at a payphone with a stack of dimes," says Martin, former director of the Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice.

Today, supervision software from Tyler Technologies gives Clark County officers customized dashboards to access information such as an incarcerated individual's mental health and intervention history, medications, and suicide concerns. Data is also shared in real time between supervision staff, law enforcement and the courts — and it's aggregated for department-wide analytics to track trends in caseloads and recidivism and for public reporting.

"The technology made all the difference in the world," Martin says. "It took all the nonsense away from my officers, allowing them to concentrate on more complex cases and public safety matters."

Data compiled from older records also helped the county dispel narratives about a popular local diversion program, which was found to have a 90% failure rate. "With data, you can get in front of the narratives before they run you over," Martin says.

Strategies for Success

Modern supervision software is a powerful tool, but it needs to be aligned with your department's key priorities. "Having a bigger plan and thinking about the ways to maximize the benefits of the software is really important," says Justin Stephenson, assistant IT director for Midland County, Texas.

As with any technology implementation, change management is critical. "You need to communicate with users and other stakeholders — and you need to do it often," Martin says. That begins by explaining the need for changes, including the advantages of modernizing systems in the cloud, and bringing together leaders at all levels of the organization to map out changes in workflows and processes.

Selecting a system vendor is another crucial step. Consider these key factors:

- ☑ Ease of integration with other justice systems, such as courts and prison management software
- ☑ Security and compliance with justice regulations
- ☑ Availability of mobile solutions for officers in the field
- ☑ Use of automation to reduce time spent on low-level tasks
- ☑ Availability of integrated monitoring systems and real-time alerts
- ☑ Data-reporting capabilities
- ☑ The amount and quality of implementation support

Organizations must strike a balance between customization and standardization as systems are implemented. Martin saw this firsthand when Nevada counties opted to standardize on Tyler's supervision system. "Every jurisdiction wanted things a little different, but as a group we had to find common ground," he says. The implementation process also provides an opportunity to map workflows and document underlying business processes.

As you work through these issues, keep the goal in mind — giving supervision personnel better tools to manage their caseloads, lower recidivism and improve outcomes. "This work will help officers, families and communities," Martin says.

Midland County, Texas:
New Data for Officers, Leaders and the Public

The number of defendants under supervision in Midland County, Texas, has risen steadily over the past decade — from around 700 a month in 2012 to more than 2,000 a month today. On average, each officer handles 230 cases, and the county's previous supervision software focused more on generating paperwork than managing the processes behind it.

"Each piece of paper is a mirror of the workflow," says Justin Stephenson, the county's IT project and infrastructure manager. "Within that paperwork is the true workflow — assigning cases and scheduling appointments."

The county implemented Tyler's Enterprise Supervision software, a cloud-based solution that automates offender check-ins and reporting and provides alerts from monitoring devices. The solution also integrates with the county's jail and court systems and electronic payments platform. These capabilities will "reduce time and caseloads," Stephenson says, urging other jurisdictions to think expansively about modernization.

"It can improve the workflow of your department and have a lot more functionality than just being a digital version of paper," Stephenson says. "The system has helped us streamline some of the processes in the department, get a better picture of cases out there, and brought everything into a single pane of glass so we can manage the entire office from one piece of software."

1. https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/ji21st.pdf

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