

## Project Safeway

Project Safeway began in Chicago, Illinois, in the early 1990s and was created through a partnership between the Cook County Adult Probation Department (CCAPD), Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime (TASC), and The Safer Foundation. The program rested on the notion that probation is inherently community-based and should therefore be decentralized to create stronger links among community members, nonprofit agencies, community organizations, and probation. According to N. L. Martin and A. J. Lurigio, one of the main strategies of Project Safeway was to make probation convenient by establishing one-stop community-based reporting centers and building a network of relationships to assist probationers as they began restoring their lives. The program also reduced institutional overcrowding by targeting some drug offenders who were sentenced to periodic incarceration or work release programs. These offenders were released from jail and sentenced to home confinement and probation, according to J. Robinson and Lurigio.

Funding for Project Safeway was procured through a grant from the Chicago Public Housing Authority and federal funding related to the Weed and Seed program. The initial grant was \$88,368. Weed and Seed is a federal initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice. The mission of Weed and Seed is to "weed out" violent criminals, drug offenders, and gangs in disorganized neighborhoods while also "seeding" these areas with the necessary resources for economic viability and community efficacy. Project Safeway touched on the "weed" mandate of this philosophical movement through the close community contacts established by probation officers housed in community reporting centers. These relationships provided probation officers with critical information about the adjustment of probationers, information not normally available through mandatory monthly reporting at an office location far from the probationer's community. By developing more intimate relationships with community members and local agencies, probation officers were better able to provide the surveillance needed to "weed out" noncompliant probationers. The primary programmatic focus of Project Safeway, however, was to "seed" these selected communities with services that would then be easily accessible to probationers most in need of them.

Lurigio and Martin note that the community model of community corrections provided the theoretical underpinnings for the development of Project Safeway. This approach, according to P. Wack, embraces the idea that the "community must be given the opportunity to be equal partners in the justice system. Likewise, the community must recognize not only its right to safe streets and homes but also its responsibility for creating them." Developed during a time when community sentiment throughout the United States demanded more punitive sentencing of offenders, Project Safeway resisted the "get tough" approach to criminal justice, instead focusing on the integral role of the community in treating offenders. Community-based reporting sites facilitated connections and familiarity among probation officers, community members, agencies, churches, schools, and businesses. These relationships allowed officers to develop and coordinate community services integral to the successful rehabilitation of offenders.

According to Leanne Fiftal Alarid and Rolando V. del Carmen, probation is the most widely used **sanction** in the United States. During the 1990s, as reported by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Cook County supervised approximately 35,000 probationers each year. While Chicago comprises approximately 78 identifiable communities, the traditional provision of probation services in Cook County had required probationers to report to the main office, located at 26th Street and California on the South Side of Chicago. In addition to holding the philosophical assumption that probation should be community-based, Project Safeway addressed very practical considerations.

The geographic breadth of Chicago in addition to extended periods of inclement weather and the cost of public transportation made reporting a considerable challenge for a significant number of probationers. Project Safeway was organized into three decentralized centers in various Chicago neighborhoods: the Ida B. Wells public housing complex on the South Side, the Near North Side, and the West Side community of Lawndale. Each community in which Project Safeway operated was characterized by a disproportionate percentage of probationers relative to other Chicago communities. The decentralization of these offices allowed probationers easier access to their probation officers, thus facilitating more personal and familiar relationships between clients and providers. The convenience of a neighborhood setting helped probationers feel more comfortable and placed them near other community services that provided counseling for drug and alcohol issues.

Project Safeway offered multiple services for probationers but focused on drug and alcohol evaluation, treatment, and referrals and employment counseling. While the neighborhood centers enhanced the surveillance component of supervising the offenders with convenient drug testing, educational and vocational support services also contributed to the program's rehabilitative focus. A mandatory healthcare fair provided education particularly relevant for probationers with a history of drug dependence. Topics included the transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted diseases. Participants also received blood pressure and cholesterol screenings. Project Safeway's job fair provided networking and employment opportunities that probationers might not have received otherwise, given their criminal histories. To help probationers become more marketable, Project Safeway offered classes outlining strategies for job hunting and interviewing, as well as resume courses and courses for the general equivalency diploma (GED).

Families can be profoundly impacted by both parental drug use and contact with the criminal justice system, and Project Safeway offered services to them as well. Mental health and health education services were provided. Annually, Project Safeway invited public health providers to talk about the importance of mental health and its place in the daily lives of probationers and their loved ones. Project Safeway offered after-school programs featuring tutoring and counseling sessions for children of probationers to keep them off the streets. As a part of its annual Back to School Jamboree, Project Safeway provided school supplies to the children of probationers. Also on hand at the Jamboree were healthcare providers, who administered immunizations to children who had not yet received them.

The Cook County Adult Probation Department conducted research comparing the effectiveness of probationers receiving services through Project Safeway reporting centers, in comparison to a control group of probationers in the same catchment areas but receiving traditional probation supervision at the main reporting center. According to Lurigio and Martin, the study found that there were fewer nonreporting violations because of the ease of access and services that were provided by Project Safeway.

Project Safeway was discontinued in the late 1990s because of funding constraints.

—Tana M. McCoy

—Miranda Young

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## Further Readings

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