

Public Protection: What Works in the Safe Management of Sexual Offenders?

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Summary: Breakdown and failures in the community management of high-risk sexual offenders always raise questions about the conduct of the agencies tasked with their safe management, and cast doubt on the effectiveness of current responses to sexual offending. This brief paper reviews effective strategies for the safe community management of high-risk offenders and also considers the benefits and limits of adopting the scheme for sex offender public disclosure: ‘Sarah’s Law’, as it is colloquially known.

Keywords: Risk management, high-risk offenders, sex offenders, community supervision, probation, multi-agency working, disclosure, public protection, Northern Ireland.

Introduction

High-profile failures in the community management of high-risk sexual offenders always raise questions about the conduct of the agencies tasked with their safe management, and cast doubt on the effectiveness of current responses to sexual offending. ‘Can we manage sexual offenders safely in the community?’ is asked by public, politicians and media alike. The answer to that question is a resounding ‘yes’ if the right things are done. This short paper derives from a presentation made to Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont in April 2012 as part of the ‘Justice Series’ of seminars organised by NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders). It reviews some of the effective strategies for the safe community management of

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