Chris Asplen:

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Chris Asplen:

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Chris Asplen, and I am the executive director of the National Criminal Justice Association. We here at NCJA certainly hope that you and yours are all safe and well at this time. We hope, in particular, that those folks in the parts of the country that are experiencing a surge in the coronavirus issues, we think of you all, especially, at this time, but again, we hope all are safe and well.

Chris Asplen:

It's my pleasure to welcome you to our webinar today on supervision technology. This is really the second webinar in a series on technology and the coronavirus. First was on core technologies, and that is available on our website. Watch your inbox for future webinars on the website. I want to start off by giving a shout-out to TRACKtech, who is a great partner of ours, a sponsor of our forum. It was really through conversations with the folks at TRACKtech about the the value of supervision technologies and the utilization of supervision technologies, particularly in the context of early release, et cetera, as a result of coronavirus that we decided to put this webinar together. So, again, thanks to the folks at TRACKtech for your help in that regard.

Chris Asplen:

Before we go over, let me go over a few logistical items. The regular rules apply. First, we'll be recording today's session. The recording and the slides from this session will be emailed to everyone who registered, as well as posted to the NCJA website. Due to the number of people joining us today, we have muted all of the participants to reduce background noise. If you have questions, we encourage you to submit them using the question and answer box at the bottom of the screen.

Chris Asplen:

We've included time for question and answer period at the end of the presentation. So, if your question doesn't get answered as part of the main presentation, we'll try to answer it during the Q&A. However, you can certainly submit your question at any time. If you'd like to communicate with NCJA staff during the webinar, please submit the comment using your chat feature. Finally, at the end of the session, we'll be launching a short poll. We encourage you to fill this out to help us continue to improve our webinar offerings.

Chris Asplen:

Let me start off by briefly introducing our speakers today who have been kind enough to join us and add their expertise to our discussion. Joe Russo is program manager with the University of Denver, where he has supported a variety of National Institute of Justice funded initiatives. His work is focused on the identification of high priority technology needs for corrections professionals, and managing projects to provide these professionals with better information and tools to perform their important mission.

Chris Asplen:

Prior to joining DU, Mr. Russo served both the New York City Police Department... I'm sorry, the New York City Department of Probation and the New York City Department of Corrections. Mr. Russo is active in a number of national associations. He was recently elected to the position of secretary of the American Probation and Parole Association.

Chris Asplen:

Lisa Lopez-Canseco has been employed with Crosspoint for approximately 22 years. She began her career with the agency in October of 1997 as a case worker aide at the female facility. Prior house, and after serving in different positions, including case manager and unit manager, she was ultimately promoted to program administrator. As program administrator, she's currently responsible for planning, directing, coordinating, and monitoring the day-to-day operations of the Federal Bureau of Prisons program facilities and the personnel issues at two Crosspoint residential reentry centers.

Chris Asplen:

She holds a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She's a North San Chamber of Commerce Leadership Lab 2013 graduate, current member of the International Community of Corrections Association Board and Public Policy Committee, and is the ICCA president elect. So, again, thank you to Lisa and Joe for being here.

Chris Asplen:

What I'd like to do now is to give a brief emphasis on brief overview of CESF funding, which is really the genesis of today's webinar. Again, this is one in a series of webinars that we've had, but I recognize that there are some folks on the phone or on the webinar today who have heard this presentation many times in the context of other issues regarding COVID and the utilization of CESF funds. But in looking through the registration, I see that there are some folks that are completely new. So, I'm going to try to walk that fine line for a few minutes to not be too repetitive, but also to make sure that new folks have a good understanding of what it is that we're talking about, and what brings us here.

Chris Asplen:

You're all familiar probably with the Cares Act, which was passed by Congress this year. As part of the Cares Act, the CESF, the Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding program, was instituted. Now, that program provided $850 million specifically for criminal justice and law enforcement applications, specifically to, quote-unquote, prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus domestically or internationally. Those three elements are really important; prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.

Chris Asplen:

The way that that was done, the way that that $150 million was distributed was by leveraging the Byrne JAG formula, which you are probably all familiar with, and by utilizing the State Administering Agencies, or the SAAs, using their offices in their position to push the money out to the localities. The recognition on the Department of Justice side was really the most efficient, and effective, and flexible way to get the money out into the localities where it is needed for a whole number of purposes that we'll talk about in a minute.

Chris Asplen:

But I can tell you as the folks that have been on the front end of it helping the SAAs understand and implement it, I can tell you that the Department of Justice was quite magnificent in just how quickly they did get the funding out, how quickly they approved the applications, how quickly the money was sent out. It really, really was an impressive effort by the government. $850 million, believe it or not, it's not that easy to move, but the Department of Justice, and BJA in particular, did a fantastic job, and we were really happy and proud to be part of that effort.

Chris Asplen:

So, let me give you a little bit of an idea of the language of the CESF that goes into what some of the allowable expenses or applications are for. So, the funds awarded under the CESF program must be utilized, again, to prevent, prepare for, or respond to the coronavirus. Allowable projects and purchases include, but are not limited to, overtime equipment, including law enforcement, medical personnel, protective equipment, hiring supplies, such as gloves, masks, sanitizer, training, travel expenses, particularly related to the distribution of the resources impacted by the most impacted areas, and addressing the medical needs of inmates in state, local, and tribal prisons, jails, and detention centers.

Chris Asplen:

Now, as part of this, what we realized is that technologies that facilitate monitoring of early releases as a result of coronavirus is also one of the applicable expenses that CESF funds can be used for. One of the things that we've tried to do from the beginning of the CESF program is to help work with agencies and with SAAs to talk about the importance of ensuring that we're preparing for collateral consequences down the line. So, while the applications were in doing a while ago, a couple of months ago, and while the money has been distributed to the localities for the most part and to the SAAs, there is money that can be applied for in many of the SAAs offices already because of the recognition that we need to spread the value of that funding out over the two years because of continued issues that will arise.

Chris Asplen:

That being said, let me suggest to you, folks who are on the phone or on the webinar, who may not know who your SAA is, feel free to visit the NCJA website so that you can identify in the individual state who the SAAs, what their offices are, and you can begin to have a discussion to see if there are some possibilities in that particular state. At the end of the webinar today, not only will that website be available to you, but also a much more detailed webinar is on our website specifically on CESF, just in case this abbreviated version is not enough for you and you'd like to find out more about it.

Chris Asplen:

With that, let me go ahead and now turn it over to Joe who will give us an overview of the technology and the smartphone apps that can be used for these purposes. So, Joe, go ahead and take it away.

Joe Russo:

Thank you, Chris. Can you all see my screen? Yes? Thumbs up. Awesome. So, these are certainly interesting times, obviously. Community supervision is highly challenging even in normal conditions, right? But when you add the pandemic on top of it, and the challenge of having to provide quality community supervision services in a socially distancing world, it can seem pretty daunting. The economist, Milton Friedman, has a great quote. He says that only a crisis, real or perceived, produces real change.

Joe Russo:

Well, clearly, we're in crisis mode right now. We're knee-deep in crisis. So, too, we have opportunities for change. At a necessity, we must rely on technology to support community supervision agencies so that we can continue to provide quality services that we've been doing over the last several decades. But as Chris mentioned, as the dynamic is changing, as we're thinking about releasing more inmates from incarceration earlier, community supervision is going to be leaned on that much more heavily.

Joe Russo:

Tele-supervision or remote supervision, whatever you want to call it, is not a new concept. It's been around for decades. Several agencies have embraced this, but the current climate is forcing the rest of the agencies to take another look at technology and how it can support operations. So, the pandemic, in a lot of respects, is simply accelerating how agencies look at technology to bolster their services and provide greater community supervision to the public.

Joe Russo:

Just to give you an idea of the landscape of tele-supervision or remote supervision, again, as I mentioned, not new, not remotely new. I've tried to organize some of these technologies in buckets, starting at the far left, location-based technologies. The earliest RF systems that were house-arrest based, basically determining whether a client is maintaining their curfew compliance, have been around since the mid-1980s.

Joe Russo:

That was soon followed up by GPS tracking that allows us to monitor locations of offenders of the community on a 24/7 basis. Check-in systems, again, had been around for decades. The earliest system were interactive voice response systems or calling systems. Also, automated reporting kiosks were used quite a bit. All of these systems are still in use, by the way. But also internet reporting. There are some tools that allow clients to get online, go to a website, and do their reporting requirements via the web. So, again, different ways of checking in remotely.

Joe Russo:

Alcohol testing is an area that's leveraged technology, again, for decades. The home breathalyzer systems are well-established. They've given way in recent years to portable breathalyzers, things that are handheld that clients can carry with them as they do their business in the community, and when prompted, can take breath samples.

Joe Russo:

Interlocks has been around, again, for many years for the DWI population, and continues to be very relevant. All remote technologies that don't require the client to enter an office or interact with a probation officer. Continuous transdermal devices, a little bit more recent, but bracelets that are worn on the client's take readings of insensible perspiration that go through the skin to detect alcohol levels on a continuous basis. Again, completely remote, completely hands-off in terms of contact with officers.

Joe Russo:

More recently, I think agencies are looking at meeting and collaboration tools. Even pre-COVID, there were jurisdictions that were using FaceTime and Skype to connect with their clientele. This was primarily jurisdictions that maybe had a large geographic area, and they looked at these technologies as a way to communicate with their clients who maybe live in the more remote or rural areas of their jurisdiction. Some counties are several hundred miles in scope, so it can be very difficult for clients to get to probation offices, and vice versa, the officer to get out to the field. So, these agencies were leveraging these tools to make those connections.

Joe Russo:

Group sessions, there are some jurisdictions that were leveraging... Nebraska comes to mind... leveraging their internal telemedicine infrastructure to deliver anger management and other skills training to groups of offenders in common locations, for example, sheriff's departments in different parts of the state so that they can attend those as a group and not have to all commute several hours to a large city, for example. So, those are pretty well-established as well.

Joe Russo:

More recently, we're looking to Zoom, and WebEx, and things like we're doing today, to interact and do court sessions. Virtual drug court is becoming a thing. So, it's really the direction of the future, but at the same time, there's nothing new here. Well-established remote tele-supervision technologies have been used for decades. I'm hoping that the COVID epidemic will help show us that these technologies can be incorporated in a responsible way and effective way, and have legs well beyond the COVID pandemic.

Joe Russo:

One of the areas that I'm particularly excited about are smartphone applications because in part, they capture or they address a lot of these existing issues. In some way, shape, or form, they can address location, check-ins, alcohol testing, as well as meeting and collaboration. So, what our smartphone applications? Essentially, they're specialized case management and monitoring tools developed for community supervision purposes. They're typically downloaded on the offender's smartphone or one that can be provided to them. In that way, the officer can communicate with the client, support the client, connect with the client, and maintain awareness of activities remotely without having the client come into probation offices.

Joe Russo:

So, the reason for smartphone applications gaining traction, I believe, are kind of two fold. It's really a combination of the power of the smartphone as a tool combined with ubiquity. We all know that the smartphones that we carry around with us are far more powerful than the computers that sent folks to the moon back in the '60s. It's incredible when you think about the power that we're carrying around in our pockets, particularly when you contrast it to a GPS device, or a breathalyzer, or something that's relatively dumb, in quotes, in terms of its capabilities. So, that's a big feature.

Joe Russo:

Obviously, it's internet-enabled. We're able to access the world at our fingertips. Location awareness is built-in, it's native through GPS chips, through wifi location services, through cell tower triangulation techniques. Obviously, wireless data, we are able to transmit messages, emails, documents seamlessly, easily without much effort at all. The video capabilities are very important. The ability to do FaceTime, video chats, video recordings, group conferences, can't be overstated. And peripherals. I'll talk a little bit more about this later, but the ability of these smartphones to connect with external devices expands the capacity of these devices of the smartphones in ways that we're still learning, I think.

Joe Russo:

The other aspect or major issue here is ubiquity. Almost everyone owns a smartphone. 81% of US adults own smartphones, and not surprisingly, that number is skewed when you talk about younger populations. Anecdotally, the agencies I've talked to report that even the most indigent of clients somehow managed to have a smartphone and managed to have a data plan of some type. For those who don't have that, again, the vendor products either provide phones, or there are programs that provide phones for client use. So, the combination of ubiquity and power are really exciting in terms of a tool for community supervision.

Joe Russo:

A general functionality of these tools, and these are just possibilities, not every product can do every one of these elements. Not everyone does it to the same extent. So, I try to focus this talk more in terms of functionality versus product-centered. But as we discussed, remote check-ins, the ability to check in with clients and get basic information. Have you changed your address? Have you been contacted by law enforcement? Are you employed? Has that changed at all? That all can be done via the smartphone. It can be done on demand, the officer can ping the client and ask for a response at that point. It could be scheduled, it could be random.

Joe Russo:

In some cases, some apps allow it to be client-initiated. So, if the client wants to proactively let the officer know that, "Hey, I lost my job today," they can do so. Location tracking is one powerful aspect of it. This is divided in two approaches. One is periodic or a point in time checks versus continuous checking. Periodic checking just means that you're checking into the officer or to the app and documenting your GPS point at that point in time. Typically, that location point is connected to the client via some kind of biometric, or a pin, or something of that nature that basically connects the individual to the phone at the time the GPS point was collected.

Joe Russo:

The other approach is more of a continuous approach. It's more akin to a traditional two-piece GPS device where it's tethered to the client via our app or Bluetooth bracelet that makes sure that the smartphone is in proximity to the individual client throughout the day. So, the data points that are collected are associated with that individual.

Joe Russo:

One of the key features that almost all apps have are calendar reminders. We know that our clients lead chaotic lives. They don't always meet their obligations, but very often, simple reminders are effective in reducing failure to appear. So, these apps allow for the structure to create calendars and push reminders to clients about important events like court dates. Some apps also provide a platform for pro-social networks support. So, if a client has some people in their lives who are engaged and invested in their success, these other folks can have access to calendars so they know that Johnny has a court date next Thursday, and they can help keep that client on track, which is pretty powerful.

Joe Russo:

I mentioned peripherals. One of the peripherals is a portable breathalyzer. Some apps are connected with the breathalyzer. So, the breath sample is taken, is documented via the smartphones video capabilities, and results are transmitted. We know that positive reinforcements are important. Evidence-based practices tells us that. Some of these apps have the capability to generate automatic praise or attaboys acknowledging when the client is doing the right thing, or a pattern of behavior emerges that is positive.

Joe Russo:

Some apps include gamification. So, depending on whatever parameters are set, the client can earn points for making curfew every day this week, or going to his job on time every day this week. Then, they can redeem points, for example, for a coupon or a gift certificate to a supermarket, or to buy groceries, or something of that nature.

Joe Russo:

We also know that a lot of our clients don't just deal with probation and parole. They deal with social services, child welfare. Some of these apps offer a HIPPA compliant platform for cross-agency information sharing. So, it really helps with continuity of care. Multiple agencies are looking at the same information, gets the same information at the same time. Document management is an aspect that some apps offer as well. So, consider the ability to send your client the conditions of supervision via the app, and they can refer to that at any time. Working the other way around, the client can take a picture of his pay stub or her pay stub and upload that to the supervision officer so that the documentation is fairly automated, doesn't require a visit to the office and time down from work to get to the office and so on.

Joe Russo:

Again, the video aspects can't be overstated, the ability to do a video chat with an officer at any time really on demand, or treatment sessions, or group sessions. Virtual home visits can be done. You can ask your clients, during a video chat, to look at the refrigerator and open up the refrigerator, show me what's inside. Is there alcohol in there? Show me your dining room table or your coffee table. Is there anything in plain sight that might be an issue? So, different ways of using the video aspect that creative officers can really go well with.

Joe Russo:

Program delivery. We can use smartphone apps. A lot of applications are accessed and allowing access to online cognitive based treatment approaches to recovery support tools, various interventions that help the offender stay on track in the substance abuse and mental health world. Specific apps have been developed for recovery support. So, some of these criminal justice apps are leveraging that work that's been done.

Joe Russo:

Quickly, benefits. Obviously, increased communication and connection with our clientele. That's ever more important in the COVID age where people are isolated and disconnected. The ability to have this instant connection and communication tool is even more important. Some agencies report that they have better communications with their clients than they did face-to-face, which was interesting. They find that the clients are more open, more willing to share electronically. Maybe that has to do with just inhibition with electronic means versus the direct perceived confrontational interaction with an officer face to face. So, certainly, something worth looking further study.

Joe Russo:

Can be a great force multiplier. It's more efficient method of communicating with clients. You don't have to wait around for the client to come in, missed appointments, misconnections. Theoretically, you can send broadcast emails to your entire case load or messages to your entire caseload on the system if a new job opportunity or something of that nature came up. From what I understand, most applications are pretty quick to ramp up. There's not a lot of lead time necessary to get these going, and they're fairly cost effective. Some of the apps can be as low as less than a dollar a day. Others can be up to $2 a day.

Joe Russo:

We know the COVID situation is going to have an impact on budgets, state, local budgets, moving forward. Hopefully, some of these monies will help offset that. But it's certainly important to look at how technologies can deliver services more effectively and efficiently moving forward.

Joe Russo:

Smartphone apps should be a bit more future proof than some of the other built-for-purpose corrections technology where a lot of R&D effort and monies went into developing a product. So, vendors may not be as willing to update things as they go along. A lot of the market... This is essentially a consumer-driven market, the smartphone market. So, a lot of the improvements that are going to be occurring in the larger marketplace will benefit community supervision moving forward. For example, Samsung has a patent for a smartphone that has a built-in breathalyzer. So, you wouldn't need two separate devices if that ever comes to market.

Joe Russo:

The last thing I want to talk about in terms of benefits is an example of one app that's being used in Utah Department of Corrections. They're using this app, and it's traditionally designed to be operated via the smartphone, but it could be operated on a tablet, for example. That's exactly what Utah is doing. They're allowing inmates access to the application via inmate tablets. So, they're starting their reentry process, looking at resources, maybe doing some preliminary job searches via the application. Then, when they're released to community supervision, they have access to the same app just on a smartphone. So, they're able to continue continuity of using that resource throughout the process of supervision.

Joe Russo:

This is sampling of vendors, not an exhaustive list by any means, and certainly not endorsements of any particular company. It really just put this up there to show how broad the market is, and it's growing rapidly. It seems to be... new companies seem to be emerging every few months. So, it's something that the vendor side is keeping track of as well and looking to fill a niche.

Joe Russo:

Finally, resources. APPA put out an issue paper in April on this particular topic. The idea was to inform and educate the public about the technology, what the capabilities and limitations are, and more importantly, what the operational implications and things that agencies would consider as they can move forward in this approach, if that makes sense for their particular agency.

Joe Russo:

Thank you, Chris.

Chris Asplen:

Thank you, Joe. We really appreciate it. So now, let's turn it over to Lisa. Let's get the practitioner perspective, if you will, and what it's like to use these technologies as boots on the ground.

Lisa Lopez:

Thank you, Chris, and thank you, NCJA, for allowing this opportunity to speak to everybody about really what this looks like. We contract with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and we just came out of a 10-year contract where technology was really forbidden. Residents under that contract, again, 13 years ago, really had to get special permission even to use a cell phone for work purposes. So, here we are, today, under this new contract where in the new statement of work with the Bureau of Prisons, GPS was a requirement for a certain portion of our population.

Lisa Lopez:

We went from just having a few people on GPS to now really the Bureau not only accepting technology, but we are really embracing it and relying on accounting for the clients that are in our program. So, our world has changed dramatically. Our new contract started in October, and we secured a provider, and we learned about location monitoring via GPS with smartphones because smartphones are now allowed. With this contract, all of our clients can have smartphones, and also continuous tracking, as Joe mentioned.

Lisa Lopez:

So, unbeknownst to us back in October, we were just so happy and ready to enter into the 21st century. Then, bam come March, our world changed and we had to quickly start embracing and become experts with our new system, as did our residents. They didn't have a choice. The train was moving, and they needed to hop on. So, as you can imagine, it really was an uphill battle where you have residents in your facility that, number one, have never probably even used a smartphone or seen a smartphone, but now they have to figure out how to upload the app, how to use it. It was a learning process, but our residents really embraced it as well.

Lisa Lopez:

Before smartphone technology, the way we would account for residents is they would call into our facility. All of our facilities had caller ID, and we would gauge their whereabouts by the number that they're calling from. So, there's a lot of pros and cons with that, right? You can spoof numbers, you can call and then leave. So, with the smartphone technology, and the app, and the continuous location monitoring, all of that went away. It really provided a lot of relief for our clients because if they went somewhere and the location didn't have a phone for them to use, if they didn't have a payphone and we didn't hear from them, well, in our world, escape procedures begin. But they're not really on escape, they just don't have access to a phone.

Lisa Lopez:

So, now again, with the smartphone technology, they're able to let us know what's happening, we trust them, and then we verify. So, we'll let them know, "Mr. So-and-so, thank you for calling. I'm going to send you a check-in, complete it so we can ascertain your whereabouts." They comply. So, it's really taken away a lot of the obstacles that they were facing when they're in the community job searching, or maybe at work late, that they had before.

Lisa Lopez:

So, with COVID, the pandemic, it's innovation out of necessity. So, we had to figure out how we're going to account for all the individuals that are transitioning from federal prisons into settings like ours. Because as we all know, they released a number of federal inmates into our RCs. Our contract only allowed for 40 individuals on home confinement, and our highest number today has been about 103 individuals on home confinement. So, it really has helped us in ensuring that we're meeting our contractual obligations, that the clients are where they're supposed to be.

Lisa Lopez:

The beauty of it really is that you can design a program based on somebody's risk level. If somebody is very, very, very high risk, we're probably going to exercise the option of putting an ankle monitor on him or her so that you have the continuous, as Joe mentioned, you have the continuous monitoring of their whereabouts. You create a zone, and you get an alert the moment they step out of that zone. The location monitoring, again, it's where you send them a check-in, or you give them times to check in, and their movement is reconciled at the point of that check-in. You can schedule one a day if somebody's really low risk, or you can schedule 24 a day and have them check in every hour on the hour.

Lisa Lopez:

So, it gives us a lot of flexibility, and it gives the clients the ability to be responsible. The other really dynamic part of it and the beautiful part of it... I love this stuff, if you can tell, because it gives you so much creativity, and it really gives the clients or residents ownership. Because if you have somebody on ankle monitor, let's just say that they're compliant for 30 days. As Chris stated, positive reinforcement, those attaboys, is so important. Just like for those of us that have kids, we all know that timeout doesn't always work for them. At least for my kids, time out didn't work. It's that positive reinforcement that solicits change in behavior.

Lisa Lopez:

So, if somebody is doing really well, we'll take them off the ankle monitor. Let's go to that check-in app, and maybe start off with 10 check-ins a day. Okay, you're doing great, let's start with... let's go down to five. Lett's now go down to one. It works both sides of that coin. Because if somebody is not compliant with their check-ins, guess what, you're now on an ankle monitor, and you have to prove you're compliant with that. So, it's just been a very, very interesting time for us navigating through these obstacles.

Lisa Lopez:

The weird part of it too is the clients don't ever get a message on their end that they're check-in has been completed with this, or that we approved it. They'll call us back, and they'll just say, "Did my check-in go through? I just want to make sure I'm in compliance." So, we really reward them for that as well, because not everybody does that. We actually shared that with our provider, and they're looking at creating something so that clients do get a completed check-in on their end so that they have peace of mind as well.

Lisa Lopez:

So, we haven't had the good fortune of using it a whole lot with movement and such because we've been on lockdown really since March, but we're able to see them virtually. We also are required to go out to their home, even now with the pandemic, even here in Texas where things are just spreading. We still see them in person, but we're also connecting with them virtually. So, it really does foster good relationship building, good communication.

Lisa Lopez:

The other really interesting part of this, too, is we have people that are sent to us that are direct home confinement cases. So, they'll come to our facility and they'll be here maybe 10 minutes for us to do an intake. Then, they go home, they go on home confinement. So, we don't know anything about them. We really rely on the Zoom, seeing them face-to-face to build that connection and that relationship with trying to keep everybody safe. That's it.

Chris Asplen:

Thank you, Lisa. That's really interesting. So, a couple of questions for you both. First of all, Lisa, you talked about the ankle monitoring both as an incentive to get off it, but also as almost a reprimand if you have to get back on it. Do you ever see smartphone apps replacing... I'll refer to that as traditional monitoring. Do you see smartphone apps replacing traditional monitoring, electronic monitoring, I should say?

Lisa Lopez:

Versus the continuous monitoring?

Chris Asplen:

Yeah, cell phone apps versus traditional electronic continuous monitoring. Yeah.

Lisa Lopez:

It possibly could. It's just right now, it really... Like with us, if you have somebody that is just... We use the RAS, Risk and Assessment System, and that measures the risk of recidivism and their criminogenic needs. You are going to have individuals that you want to make sure they are where they're supposed to be every single minute of every single day. So, I don't see it going away entirely, but I could see it more as an option for you to give that positive reinforcement for those that are doing what they're supposed to do, and rewarding them. Did that answer your question?

Chris Asplen:

Yeah. Yeah. Joe, do you have any thoughts on that?

Joe Russo:

Yeah, I think I would agree. I think for high risk clientele, the traditional GPS bracelets are not going anywhere, that they're probably the best tool for purpose. We know that no technology is perfect, every technology can be circumvented. But we know a lot more about how GPS can be circumvented than we do about cell phones, for example, or smartphone. So, I think we need more research in terms of the vulnerabilities that are unique to the smartphone applications. Even though they're tethered, they're a slightly different animal. So, I think we need to know more about what the gaps are.

Lisa Lopez:

Even now with the location monitoring, if I can just hop on that, we do have individuals that really try to bust the system. They think they're really, really bright. So, what we see is we look for patterns. So, when we do a check-in, if it goes more than five minutes that they've responded, something is wrong there. None of us live in a mansion. It shouldn't take you 30 minutes to cross the hall to do your check-in. You hear it, you check in. So, if you have somebody that is constantly 10, 20, 30 minutes behind doing a check-in, then you have to start taking action. Pull them in, put them on an ankle monitor, just take some kind of an action. Believe me, we've only been in this world for about five months, but I feel like I've seen everything that possibly can be done.

Chris Asplen:

Oh, I bet you'll find more things. I know it feels that way, but I bet.

Chris Asplen:

A thought struck me as you were talking, and it goes to, I guess, the extent to which these technologies make life a little bit easier for your clients in certain regards. Is there an argument on the other side of the fence that says, "But wait a minute, you know what, having to schedule yourself in time so you show up for a meeting at the probation office, and that you manage the public transportation system..." That's skilled development in and of itself, right? Those are important skills and an important part of an individual's reintegration. Is there a thought to that idea? Is there a way to compensate, I guess, for the skill building so that it just, quite frankly, doesn't become too easy to be monitored? Does that question make sense at all? Maybe not.

Lisa Lopez:

I'm trying to follow you. [crosstalk 00:44:35].

Joe Russo:

Yeah, I'll jump in. I think that what you're talking about is the benefits of accountability and structure. I think there's benefits that are inherent just being on monitoring, not necessarily having to report to the probation office and what that all entails. Personally, I would much rather see that effort, that planning, that organization go towards getting to work or getting to school and not necessarily getting to the probation department, if it's a low enough risk case where you can handle it remotely.

Chris Asplen:

That answers my question. There are other things to look to, or the kinds of activities that electronic monitoring and smartphones may make easier. We can still find other avenues to make sure that those other skills are being developed. Because part of my thought process here is, just from a cost benefit analysis and making sure that as state budgets get smaller and smaller, that the argument is there, is continued for the electronic monitoring.

Chris Asplen:

Corollary to that idea on the cost benefit analysis, is it a function of some of these technologies to effectively capture data and matrices that allow us to better analyze, and more quickly analyze, the success that you're having with them? So, in other words, in the future, when states are looking at where are they going to put money into going back to housing people in facilities as much as we used to, or we're going to put money into technology, or the technology is going to help us with that kind of analysis.

Lisa Lopez:

I can take a stab at that. That's a really, really great question. Obviously, for us, for our vendor, the most important aspect of the program is accountability. I was sharing with you yesterday that we have audits by the Bureau of Prisons four times a year. One of the things they ask is really how accountable was somebody? What were the infractions? So, at a click of a button, our provider was able to just give us a report and spit that out.

Lisa Lopez:

I am also interested in looking at the transition pieces, the case management piece. We can upload resources and provide a resource list to the residents. We can upload employers that are actively hiring. Looking at how effective were those resources? How often did he go out job searching? So, for us, we not only have an internal database, but the provider that we have, we're inching toward that so that we can start capturing those kinds of metrics. Because that's very, very important to see exactly how this technology supported their overall transition.

Joe Russo:

Yeah, if I could hop onto that, I think obviously there's potential to use that data to determine outcomes, to determine how to fine-tune programs, to determine what are the predicates of success or failures, for example. I'm skeptical because that's another step that often we don't take, right? We're so busy implementing programs that we don't necessarily take the next step of analyzing fine-tuning, figuring it out, adapting.

Joe Russo:

For example, we've been using GPS technology for over 20 years, but we still haven't maximized all of that research. Think about how many GPS location data points we have of the thousands of offenders and the thousands of points every day, and what research tells us about patterns of life, and what that means to the criminal path. We haven't really connected movement patterns or anomalies to patterns as a predictor, for example, of whether someone is on the track to success or failure. It's not for lack of data because the data is there. To answer your question, Chris, potentially, absolutely. The next step is the important one, is putting that... making it actionable.

Chris Asplen:

Are most of these technologies fairly siloed, or is there... At least it sounds like there's a little bit of connectivity to case management on your side, but it seems to me... Again, a corollary to this broader data question is, is there a connectivity between the technologies, and the case management systems, and the court systems, et cetera? Have they not, either from a technology standpoint, not made those connections? There's also a lot of permissions that you have to get from a lot of different areas.

Lisa Lopez:

Right. So, right now, we're using three different systems. One of our systems is really just focused on the case management piece. We just introduced, just a couple of months ago, a section or a part of the application where a resident can submit a pass wherever they want to go, whether it's medical. We did open up job searching for a couple of weeks here in San Antonio. So, if they wanted to go job searching, they were able to submit that. It really helped us as staff because you don't have the problem of losing paper, but you have a track of the communication. You can tell when the client submitted it, you can vet it on your computer, and you can approve it.

Lisa Lopez:

So, I want to slowly enter into that world of just putting everything into one application. We have talked to our different providers to see if they can integrate the system somehow rather than having this duplication of efforts. I didn't want to do that, I didn't want to have us having a lot of duplicity. So, we're not there yet, but I'm hoping that we won't get there.

Chris Asplen:

One question has come up in the question and answer section. Is there an applicability, and if so, how does it differentiate use of technology when supervising sex offenders, sex trafficking offenses, things like that?

Lisa Lopez:

Crosspoint doesn't supervise individuals convicted of sexual offenses or individuals convicted of murder. So, I couldn't really speak to that. I'm not sure if Joe could.

Joe Russo:

I think regardless of what the type of offender is, you incorporate the technology as part of the larger case management plan. So, it's part of a larger strategy. Tying it back to remote or tele-supervision, I didn't mention this in my bucket chart, but we've had tools that can remotely monitor computer use, tablet use, phone use, that specifically relates to sex offender management and that kind of the containment model. So, that might be a potential application.

Joe Russo:

But in terms of the smartphone itself, there might be different types of questions, different focuses. You might be very much... you may want to use continuous tracking because inclusion zones and exclusion zones are going to be that much more important with a sex offender, and periodic checks are not going to cut it as far as an exclusion zone or an inclusion zone. So, that would be how that might be handled differently.

Chris Asplen:

Great. Thank you. No, we're running towards the end of our session. We've got one more question. But before that, I'm going to ask... we're going to open up for a short poll, so please let us know what you think about the webinar. Oh, there it is. It just popped up on my screen. But while that's there, let me ask one final question that goes to the issue of scaling up. If in a particular state this is done by one agency or one local government, what considerations do you think carry into another agency or population for as to whether or not to participate in something like this?

Lisa Lopez:

Joe, you want me to start?

Chris Asplen:

I think Joe might be filling out the survey.

Lisa Lopez:

The survey? Well, I think, number one, you have to really be willing to dedicate some time and energy to teaching your clients about technology. It's really time-consuming. They have a lot of questions, and so just bringing them into the 21st century, teaching them, it's really, really important. The other thing is just like what we see with each other an email. I can be in the same building with somebody and they'll send me an email, and I'm thinking, "Why didn't he just come down the hallway and just tell me that?" Then maybe I didn't receive it the way that they intended for me to receive it, so I could be thinking about it and taking it wrong.

Lisa Lopez:

So, technology is only... it only takes you so far. It doesn't replace that connection that you have to build with the individual. You have to want to help them, and they have to feel that you want to help them. You're creating that partnership. So, if we're thinking this is going to replace all kinds of communication, no, it's not. It could easily backfire.

Chris Asplen:

Hopefully, technologies enables us to be more human with each other and be better humans with each other.

Joe Russo:

Chris, I think the main challenge, I think, for agencies is to figure out how to best apply this amongst their caseload. So, one of my worries is that we often have a fascination with technology. If it's new, and it's glossy and shiny, we want to use it and we want to apply it across the board. More is better. But we know that with low-risk offenders, very often, doing nothing is the best option. So, even something that we might give them with the best intentions of supporting and connecting, if we're not using it in the right way, could have negative consequences.

Joe Russo:

So, I would be all for giving or putting low-risk clients on a smartphone application provided they're not dinged if they don't comply. So, if we use it to strictly support and connect but don't make it a compliance issue, then I would be completely for that. But if it becomes a pitfall or a potential way to get into trouble, for example, then I think that there's a potential for net widening on that aspect.

Joe Russo:

On the other side of the spectrum, obviously this would not be your primary supervision method for high-risk offenders, but it could augment your traditional methods as well. So, picking the right populations and then how to apply it within those populations, I think is critical. It's not an across the board kind of thing.

Chris Asplen:

We've had one more question come in. Since we've got a couple more minutes, I'd like to make sure we get to that. The question really centers around staffing, and whether or not you see the incremental increase in the utilization of technology as ultimately allowing for or encouraging the decreasing of staffing, or if it's simply a matter of utilizing staffing in a different way.

Lisa Lopez:

For me, it's really utilizing staff in a different way. I haven't yet seen the use for cutting staff back or decrease in our staffing pattern at all. As a matter of fact, we saw the opposite because keep in mind, before, we just had 30 people to check on, now you have up to 100 people to check on. So, it went from a task that was maybe an hour to a couple of hours, maybe even past that, because you're checking up on violations, and you just want that certainty. So, I haven't seen that.

Joe Russo:

Yeah, I would agree. The technology is really ideally used to make folks more effective and more efficient, and ideally to reallocate your limited resources towards those higher-risk offenders who need that intensive personal interaction. So, the more of the low-risk offenders we can deal with with technology, frees up resources for the intense personal services for the higher risks.

Chris Asplen:

I think that's a really, really important point to keep in mind. Again, going back to that issue of difficult position budgets are going to be and state budgets are going to be in the future, and not letting funding agencies get away with that argument. Not proactively going up against that argument and saying, "Just because we're using this cool, new technology doesn't mean you need less of us. Our workload is higher. It's enabling us to deal with that workload, but don't think for a second that we need fewer people." I think that's really important for folks to keep in mind as we're looking towards [inaudible 00:58:37].

Joe Russo:

I think the false premise with that argument is that agencies were ever adequately funded, to begin with.

Chris Asplen:

Fair enough.

Joe Russo:

I don't think that was ever the case. So, yeah, you can start from that point.

Chris Asplen:

Certainly. Well, listen, thank you, Joe and Lisa. Thank you so much for your expertise and for the information today. Thank you to everybody else who is on the webinar today. Again, you can see, on our website, a number of different webinars that will explain both the CESF as well as who your SAAs are, and some other information, COVID-related information. So, please utilize that.

Chris Asplen:

Give us a call, send us an email if you feel like there's anything that we can do for you, folks. We'll be more than happy to help in any regard that we can. Again, stay safe, stay well. Thank you very much, everybody, for joining us. We'll see you next time. Thanks.

Lisa Lopez:

Thank you.