

Investment aids inmates and society

The Daily Progress | Posted: Thursday, September 6, 2012 11:02 am

“We need something where we can assess everybody that’s staying in jail,” said Ronald Matthews, superintendent of the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail.

Any why?

To help prepare programs that better assist inmates in making the transition back into society.

That’s a highly laudable goal.

Jail officials soon will be employing a new assessment tool aimed at accomplishing that goal.

Currently, most inmates answer only about 30 questions when they arrive at jail, said Mr. Matthews. The information is not detailed enough to help individualize programs for inmates or for probationers after they leave jail. The exception is the Therapeutic Community, an addiction recovery program, which does use an assessment tool.

For \$22,800, the jail will purchase a computer-based tool called COMPAS, which will better pinpoint each inmate’s special problems and needs. Some questions will be filled out by the inmate alone and others will be answered through an interview process with a professional.

The questionnaire can vary depending on an organization’s needs, but the version in use by the District 9 Probation and Parole office has 142 questions. That’s a huge leap from just 30. No wonder officials expect it to help them zero in on each inmate’s particular needs — whether anger management or drug counseling or housing assistance.

What’s more, since District 9 Probation and Parole already uses the same system, as does the Virginia Department of Corrections, the jail will be better able to coordinate inmate programs and probation efforts with other agencies.

“We’ll all be speaking the same language,” said Wendy Goodman, chief probation officer for District 9.

Helping an ex-offender to reintegrate into society is good not only for the individual, it’s good for society. Anything that increases an inmate’s odds of succeeding in the world, and that decreases his odds of re-offending, is a positive for society — reducing the emotional and financial problems that would have been suffered by new victims and saving police, courts and jails from having to pursue and incarcerate the offender again.

The Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail and its officials are to be commended for this investment in inmates' rehabilitation.