

Probation Officers Association of Ontario
P R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E
December 2003

Another year comes to an end, and we have continued to excel in our work, both on the front-lines, and as an Association. Having returned from Symposium 2003 in Niagara Falls, I can also say with certainty that we have remained an incredibly positive, upbeat bunch in light of the challenging working conditions we face on a daily basis.

Symposium 2003 exceeded our expectations in terms of professional development, and as a boost to our collective morale. Thank you to Don Larman and his organizing committee for their meticulous work and creativity, which benefited all in attendance. Feedback received to date has been very positive. Our appreciation also extends to the Ministry for their financial support, as well as their recognition of the POAO Symposium as an important training event. We are now working on Symposium 2004, which will take place November 7 to 10 in Toronto.

As delegates observed at the Annual General Meeting, it has been a very busy year, and there is no sign of change in that regard on the horizon. For those who did not attend the Symposium, and would like a hard copy of the Annual Report, please contact Laura McAndrew and distribution of the report will be arranged.

During the fall, POAO has been assisting the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness (CCAA) in their roundtables regarding child abuse issues. We have had representation at five of the eight roundtables around the province to date. Thank you to all who participated. Suggestions we have made include addressing the on-going concerns with Conditional Sentencing by excluding sexual offences from this regime. In addition, recognizing the importance of community supervision through appropriate judicial response to non-compliance would assist in dealing with those who offend repeatedly and disregard court orders imposed to enhance public safety. Increased availability of treatment for both offenders and victims was also recommended. During the latter part of the CCAA roundtable activity, John Derringer of Q107 commenced the 13 Days of Christmas Drive to grant wishes to children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect. The Provincial Executive passed a motion to donate \$200 to the CCAA – Martin Kruze Memorial Fund, to assist in granting these Christmas wishes.

The Safety and Security Committee continued to meet every other week until December 10th. Our line-by-line review of the S&S policy manual is complete and a draft is being prepared. In addition to the policy review, the Committee developed a list of recommendations in several areas. One issue that has emerged as requiring a prompt corporate response, is the activity of POs performing unscheduled home visits, particularly after-hours. This practice has arisen out of concerns with the lack of monitoring of Conditional Sentence house arrest/curfew conditions; however it places POs at risk when they conduct such visits unaccompanied by police. I am hopeful that

corporate direction will be issued in the near future that clearly prioritizes the safety of POs, over concerns with inadequate legislation and other service delivery issues.

The new provincial government appointed MPP Laurel Broton to develop a package of reforms addressing domestic violence issues. I have initiated contact with the appropriate staff to ensure that we have a role in this initiative. Our domestic violence position paper will be presented as well. Should you have any additional suggestions regarding domestic violence, please forward them to me.

The Electronic Surveillance Program (ESP) pilot for Conditional Sentencing will commence in Hamilton in January. As previously stated, our input regarding this program has been embraced by the Ministry. However, our collective concern remains that the judiciary may view this technology as a rationale for further inappropriate use of Conditional Sentencing. The Ministry is emphasizing in training sessions that the tool is only to provide evidence for compliance with conditions, not to encourage increased use of Conditional Sentencing where not appropriate.

On the youth justice front, there is also a great deal of activity. As you are all aware, the announcement regarding Youth Justice Services moving to the Children's Services Ministry has been made. The Single Jurisdiction project will move at a faster pace than originally planned as a result of this announcement. I have already heard feedback from members regarding this initiative. The announcement appears to have a promising impact in terms of Phase II young persons being able to access programming previously only available to Phase I clients. While this will be a positive outcome of the transfer, there are concerns regarding maintaining a "balanced" philosophy in the management of young persons. Please contact me with your input as we are meeting with Ministry staff on this matter.

In terms of YCJA, your comments regarding workload impact are still needed, as we continue to urge the Ministry to hire the remaining YCJA-dedicated POs. I have been asked to speak on a panel in February, regarding the implications of the YCJA for working with adolescents who sexually offend. In addition, we have been invited to put on a workshop at a conference in Hamilton in May regarding youth programs. We are designing a workshop highlighting innovative programming for youth that involves POs working with justice partners. This workshop will also be offered at POAO Symposium 2004 in Toronto. Please inform us of any such programming occurring in Ontario so that it can be included.

Workload continues to be the primary issue affecting service delivery in our profession. As you'll see in Barry McCann's article (in the Monitor), the Workload Analysis Index Committee has completed its initial task. We look forward to having an index that assists in illustrating the significant impact of initiatives that have increased our workload, as opposed to merely examining caseload numbers. Our new Minister has stated that the 100 promised POs will be hired during this government's mandate; however not commencing in this fiscal year due to the deficit. It appears that the 100

hires may occur in a staggered fashion over the subsequent three years. This issue will be at the top of my list when I meet with Minister Kwinter in the New Year.

Early in the New Year, we are expecting a response regarding our application for a grant to conduct research into the effectiveness of community-based sanctions. This application was submitted in partnership with Criminology Professor Julian Roberts. The research will involve two phases: 1) surveying POs for their input on issues related to the effectiveness of Probation and Conditional Sentencing and 2) having POs distribute surveys to victims. Should our grant application be approved, further details will be provided. Your support with this project, to obtain maximum PO participation, will be greatly appreciated.

My thanks to Darlene Humeniuk, outgoing Director, for her contributions as a Policy Director over the past two years. It is fortunate that Darlene is still with us as the Branch Chair for Southwest, so we are not saying goodbye. Welcome to Mark O'Sullivan, POAO Member of the Year for 2003, who was elected as a Director. Our first Board meeting in the New Year is January 16-17, so feel free to contact me before then with any issues. The New Year promises a great deal of activity for your Association.

As the year draws to a close, I want to thank Dave Sheen, our Wonderful Webmaster, for another year of dedicated service. Dave continues to do an incredible job with our website, which is a great source of information for all who view it. Thanks Dave!

I wish all of you a safe, happy holiday season and best wishes for 2004.



Cathy Hutchison