

*Probation Officers Association of Ontario*  
**P R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E**  
***August 2004***

The Spring and Summer have continued to be busy and productive for your Association. I hope that all of our colleagues have been managing during the transition of staff to the new Ministry. Here is a brief update of our activities from the past few months.

On April 26, Barry McCann and I met with Kathryn Biondi and Jim Bunton of the Bell Cairn Staff Training Centre regarding the Professionalism, Values and Ethics program now offered during PPO Basic Training. We provided feedback on this module including additional discussion points, and supported the delivery of this session as refresher training for experienced POs. Significant progress occurred with the agreement to have POAO present to participants during this module on an on-going basis. The first such session occurred on May 11<sup>th</sup>. This is a positive step in our involvement with Bell Cairn as POAO had previously been presenting after class to Basic Training participants. In addition, our request to be on the Training Advisory Committee was granted and we now have a seat on both the Youth Justice and Adult Community Training Advisory Committees. We had also asked that Bell Cairn not deliver mandatory PPO training at the same time as the POAO Symposium, and this arrangement has been made for 2004. We are enjoying a productive relationship with Bell Cairn and look forward to this continuing.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, Laura McAndrew and I presented a workshop at the Association of Court-Related Clinicians Conference in Hamilton. The subject was Innovative Youth Programming, featuring the TROOP program, which operates with the Toronto Police Service, as well as the CHILL program. Sergeant Bill Russell of the Toronto Police Service, presented with us and discussion was generated around how to establish programming in communities around Ontario with limited resources and funding. This workshop will be featured in a lengthier version at Symposium 2004.

Also on the youth justice front, we participated in the Alternatives to Custody consult by meeting with the two Project Leads. For this consultation, we emphasized the same principles we have been supporting regarding youth justice issues, programming, and sentencing trends under YCJA. We also held a meeting regarding on-going YCJA implementation issues with Glenn Semple and Sandy Bell-Murray. In that meeting, and a subsequent one with Deborah Newman, I emphasized the importance of having the PO's role and expertise recognized, and supporting the PO in all discussions with the Attorney General's Ministry and other justice partners. We have repeatedly stated that sentencing for youth should be on an individualized basis with recognition of risk level, rather than sentencing by "trends" or "targets". The lenient sentencing trends, disregard for breaches of court orders, and inappropriate use of Extra-Judicial Sanctions that have been observed under YCJA are of concern to POs, particularly when attempting to manage high-risk young persons who offend repeatedly.

Our meeting date with Minister Bountrogianni is being arranged. We are also hopeful that she will address delegates at Symposium 2004. A workshop on the new Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) is being offered at the Symposium.

POAO's intervention regarding the ILO issue at Central East Correctional Centre was met with a positive response from the Ministry. As you will see in the enclosed letter to ADM Mike Simpson, POAO had significant concerns regarding a pilot project to assign PPO duties to members of the Ontario Parole and Earned Release Board (OPERB). This project was proposed without consultation with either POAO or OPSEU. Your Association and bargaining agent worked together successfully on this issue and the pilot project did not commence. Mike Simpson has agreed to engage in discussions prior to considering any such project in the future.

In an effort to improve communication and working relationships with the judiciary, we offered to participate in the judge's educational conference by providing a workshop or other forum for discussion. Despite the efforts of one Justice who was very supportive of this proposal, the planning committee did not follow-through with our offer. This response is disappointing particularly in light of on-going frustrations around sentencing issues, and the recognition of the integral role of the Probation Officer. The recent treatment of one of our colleagues in Kitchener was just one example of the need for enhanced relationships and education of the judiciary. We will continue our efforts but have also requested that the Ministry attempt to engage the judiciary and address issues of concern affecting POs.

Workload continues to be a critical issue impacting our ability to manage offenders effectively in the community. We consistently impress upon the Ministries the need for additional staff. Recent announcements regarding the hiring of a small number of POs are encouraging, but we still maintain that the Liberals' election promise of 100 additional POs must be fulfilled promptly.

A disturbing issue that has arisen in recent months relates to the university degree requirement for POs. Although we won a very significant battle years ago to retain credentialism in our profession, we have learned of individuals who have been permitted to work as POs without the necessary credentials. In one such case, the PO was dealt with appropriately by the Ministry by being removed from the position. However, in another case, there has not been an appropriate, timely response. I raised this issue in a July meeting with Deputy Minister Rabeau and was hoping for a prompt and decisive response. On this issue, we are working collaboratively with the Corrections MERC team. Gord Longhi and I have an upcoming meeting with ADM Mike Simpson where we will discuss our serious concerns regarding this practice and seek prompt resolution.

The POAO Symposium funding memo was jointly released by the ADMs of both Ministries in late June, and we are thankful to the Ministries for this year's timely response. The funding mechanism is identical to that of previous years, and applies equally to Adult Community and Youth Justice Services. As always, we

encourage creativity in getting the maximum number of delegates to benefit from this experience.

Thanks to Lori Santamaria for leading the PO Week event again this year. Within this Monitor are announcements of various events that occurred around the province. The creativity demonstrated by members was very impressive, with the result of enhanced profile of our profession as well as charitable contributions to local communities.

Some very exciting news for your Association and the profession - POAO was successful in our application for a research grant! More details are contained within this edition of the Monitor. Feel free to contact me or any Provincial Executive member regarding this project or other issues relevant to our profession.

Best regards,

Cathy Hutchison