

A FINAL LOOK BACK AT THE HISTORY OF THE PROBATION OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

By Darlene Humeniuk

This is the last in a series of three articles published regarding a historical perspective of POAO. The items selected from 1977 to 1990 are intended to reflect a variety of issues and topics but are in no way representative of all aspects of the Association or its development. Summaries and news clips were gathered from archived newsletters and meetings.

For several years in the late seventies prizes were awarded to Probation Officers who submitted original articles to the quarterly newsletter "News and Notes." First prize was \$100.00; Second Prize \$50.00; Third Prize \$25.00. Early editions listed executive names and their home telephone numbers. The Association also published a monthly educational and informational newsletter, "Monthly Report" which kept members apprised of trends, recent court decisions, policy, news articles and court cases found in the *Weekly Criminal Bulletin* from 1985 to 1989.

The Children's Probation Act in 1977 received much criticism from POAO, with letters sent to the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Executive Director of The Children's Aid Society of Ontario. Although it passed third reading it was not enacted. One Probation Officer's view of Services to Juveniles:

"Probation Officers in the Juvenile field must maintain their special relationship to the courts and their identity as Probation Officers in the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Probation Officers do: youth work, family therapy, social work, community service, group work, individual counseling etc. Their identity derives from their special relationship to the courts and the milieu of authority derived there from. This special relationship to authority is unique with a distinctive status, which needs to be developed and strengthened. This is of particular importance to Probation and After Care Officers at this time".

In 1977 the provincial executive announced three goals:

1. Incorporation - achieved
2. Increased membership - achieved 429 members joined -- the most in POAO's history)
3. Active branches - partially achieved. Toronto was the only functioning branch until 1979 when Northwestern and Eastern elected a board.

The Ministry of Correctional Services established a Community Programs Division separate from the Institutional Division. Executive Director Art. F. Daniels extended an invitation to POAO to work with the Division in implementing and evaluating new directions in workload management. Recognition awards were bestowed to Probation and Parole and Aftercare Officers from regions of

the Province. The delay in implementation of the new Young Offenders Act was due to funding implications. Many Probation Officers were alarmed by the change in philosophy which seemed to stress retribution rather than rehabilitation and deeds rather than needs. A lengthy position paper was presented to MCSS regarding the role of the Probation and After Care Officer.

Hamilton, 1979 annual conference stats: Total attendees: 181 adult officers, 131 juvenile officers, 30 associate members and a standing ovation for guest speaker, Premier Bill Davis.

1980: Southwestern and Midland Branches formed.

The 1981 annual provincial conference was in jeopardy due to budget cutbacks resulting from the provincial election, with both Ministries citing money not being available, however the conference was held and was funded by POAO and conference fees. Annual membership dues increased from \$15.00 to \$21.00 per year. Six branches were firmly established: Eastern, Fanshawe Southwest, Midlands, Midwest, Northern and Toronto.

A 1982 submission made to the Senate on Bill C-61, the *Young Offenders Act*, proposed several amendments, one of which addressed practical concerns on duties and another on replacing the term "youth worker" with "probation officer". The Bill was regarded as seriously deficient and inconsistent for a probation officer to fulfill his/her responsibilities. It was recommended that probation officers be legislated to perform duties already provided for under the Juvenile Delinquents Act. The new Bill outlined authority to be provincially legislated (Sec. 2). A policy position sent to the Community Support Service Branch cited concerns about the Basic Training Course and two years experience being the only requirement for movement to Probation Officer II status. It was recommended that training include the use of outside, objective educators and continue with barrier exams. The social work syllabus was considered insufficient. In 1984 POAO members provided a public announcement that they would be available as resource persons to members preparing for the barrier exams.

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The Ontario Government, backed by British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan, mounted a last-ditch effort yesterday to persuade the federal government to postpone the April 1 implementation of a law establishing a national maximum age of 17 for youthful offenders. Provincial Justice Secretary Gordon Walker said Ontario "still harbors the view" that 16- and 17-year-olds "are just as much adults as people who are 18. And frankly the system we had before at age 16 was one which was a very acceptable position" and that "if Ontario had its way 16- and 17-year-old offenders would be removed from the Young Offenders Act and kept under the adult Criminal Code of Canada".

At the 1985 POAO annual conference, one workshop was remembered for Judge Felstiner's condemnation of the *Young Offenders Act*, which made front page news in the Globe and Mail.

President Carol Bailey oversaw an active year in 1986. The Association was approached directly about a response to Bill C-106 (proposed amendments YOA), responding with two papers sent to the provincial and federal government. The Solicitor General of Canada considered the proposals, commending the Association for its contribution to the process of juvenile justice. A Professional Development Paper regarding exams and the Code of Ethics were completed and circulated. Responses to the Ministry of Correctional Services Standards and Guidelines were being developed. The Association was approached by the Ministry of Community and Social Services regarding a study of services including probation. In the following year the MCS Deputy Minister commended the Association for its valuable submission. Toronto District Court of Ontario, March 17, 1986; Judge Cartright: "I shall never again place anybody on probation because I have no confidence in the integrity of the officers of the Ministry of Correctional Services to honour court orders". These widely publicized derogatory comments resulted in the Association's request for a judiciary review to the Canadian Judicial Council. The executive directly approached the media. The Star, the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star accurately reported the Association's position.

1987: The Association went "public" in its disagreement with the federal government's proposal to privatize two correctional centers and a large portion of its parole functions to the John Howard Society in Toronto. The following year John Howard Society rejected the proposal and split services with Operation Springboard. POAO merchandise bearing the helping hand and scales of justice crest was introduced. Questionnaires were sent out regarding Standards and Guidelines and Professional Development.

1988 to 1990: The 1983 policy paper about Privatization was viewed as relevant therefore re-circulated to both Ministers, the Solicitor General and to a Justice Critic in 1988 due to problems at halfway houses. Key points reiterated the need for Probation Services to be directly operated by the provincial government, with standards to be followed and administered by agencies offering relevant services. A Professional Accreditation Committee was struck. The constitution was finalized with amendments passed in the following years. In 1989 the Association submitted two reviews to MCSS; one regarding on secure custody issues and the other on community residential issues. Issues of Monthly Report were lengthy with one issue having up to 50 pages, containing many reprints of newspaper articles, position statements and updates. The format was downsized with a different look and a new name "The Monitor" by 1991. The 1989 annual conference held in Sudbury with 380 delegates and 400 other participants registered. The recognition of Professional Status for Probation Officers was initiated. And so ends a look back in the history of POAO. A

collection of more recent position papers are available on the website, www.poao.org. The Association continues to represent the interests and beliefs of the profession.

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