

COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS 2000:

STRATEGIES FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Probation Officers Association of Ontario

February 1998

Version 1.0

INTRODUCTION:

The Probation Officers Association of Ontario (P.O.A.O.) is a voluntary non-profit organization representing the professional interests of Probation Officers and Probation/Parole Officers across this province. Established in 1954, P.O.A.O. has formulated numerous position papers relative to issues within the criminal justice system. Our history indicates that successive governments have encouraged our input and incorporated our ideas into various program initiatives. As advocates for the professional interests of our members, we firmly believe that government initiatives should be research based and fully evaluated in order to establish effectiveness. Alternative approaches are both unacceptable and irresponsible. As stated in the findings of the Organizational Renewal Project, the philosophy of corrections needs to be based on solid research indicating what is effective in working with offenders to reduce their criminality (1995).

Mission Statement:

Through professional development, education, fellowship and policy design, the Association is an autonomous representative of Probation Officers in this province. P.O.A.O. is committed to the preservation of the fundamental role of the Probation Officer within community corrections. At the same time, we are supportive of efforts for positive change. In order to maintain our credibility and professional status, we are proactive in addressing issues and concerns which arise.

Values:

In conducting its business the P.O.A.O. prescribes to the following set of values:

- that Probation Officers achieve professional status and continue to receive ongoing education;
- that its members are fully committed to the Code of Ethics;
- that community corrections programs retain their validity as an effective means of rehabilitation for offenders;
- that autonomy be maintained, while at the same time the responsibilities of the Ministries, OPSEU, and other components of the Criminal Justice System be acknowledged;
- that involvement in the decision-making process be democratic and participatory at all levels.

In recent years, numerous changes have occurred in Probation and Parole Services including legislative amendments, increased administrative requirements, and an extremely complex offender population. The resultant impact on caseload/workload

has been significant. While expectations placed on the PPO have increased, community resources and staffing levels have declined. It is the position of the P.O.A.O. that effective changes in community corrections are required to enable the PPO to focus more specifically on client intervention. The current system, which in some jurisdictions forces the PPO to be “desk-bound”, jeopardizes public safety. Unmanageable caseloads are causing PPOs to spend less time with their clients. Reduced personal contact results in officers’ inability to ensure adequate supervision which in many cases translates into increased risk to the public. (MSGCS, 1994) The enhancement of public safety requires that the PPO have necessary training and adequate resources to effectively target crime prevention through proven intervention techniques.

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROBATION/PAROLE OFFICER:

Central to this model are the role and responsibilities of the PPO. Over the years, the role of the PPO has emerged into a unique profession that has blended elements of law enforcement, counselling, and brokering of services. As reflected in our Association’s logo, the balance of these elements is essential to this role. The ability to implement the components of our task requires a consistent approach from university educated, trained professionals who are able to utilize a wide range of skills and techniques. Government has duly recognized this unique role and the credentials required, and has expressed this belief in various policy papers, such as the PPO Credential Report, and the Workload Management Task Force Report. Responsibilities of the PPO have expanded over the years and it is important within the context of this model that primary functions be highlighted. These core functions are mandated through relevant legislation providing the essence of our role. As an Association, we accept the definition indicated in the Workload Management Task Force Report, which states the following:

The role of the PPO is to prepare reports for the Courts and the Ontario Board of Parole; to provide supervision, enforcement, counselling, and referral services for each offender as directed by the conditions of the probation order or parole certificate and subject to the offender’s assessed risks and needs. (1994)

Since its inception, POAO has supported community programs that value protection of society and rehabilitation of the offender population. Through targeted intervention, the PPO is integral to crime prevention. Effective and interactive supervision consisting of thorough assessment and individualized supervision plans is crucial to the prevention of further criminal activity. Therefore, it is critical that the PPO focus energy, skill and expertise toward direct intervention with offenders.

Though increasingly time consuming, administrative functions have always been secondary to the PPO’s role. We are hopeful that technological advancement will enable the PPO to focus more intensively on case management functions. These functions include monitoring and enforcement of conditions, brokering of services, crisis

intervention, motivational counselling, and cognitive intervention techniques to foster pro-social behaviour.

It is the position of the Association that PPOs require increased community presence through partnerships with agencies, public education, and community monitoring of offenders. Through amendments to case management strategies, PPOs would have more opportunities to participate in VIP Programs, school appearances (career days, law classes), and to enhance linkages with community agencies. Additionally, through education of the public and media, the important role of the PPO in rehabilitating the offender and contributing to public safety could be conveyed.

ASSESSMENT:

Sound assessments are the cornerstone to good correctional practice. The common objective of "risk assessment" in corrections is to determine the likelihood of recidivism on the part of offenders. Such assessments are completed by compiling offender information in a thorough and systematic fashion. POAO supports the use of assessment instruments, such as the Level of Supervision Inventory, which focus on offender risk, need, responsivity/treatability and risk management.

The Level of Supervision Inventory is the accepted assessment tool of the Ministry. The latest revision, LSI-OR, reflects current research regarding criminogenic risk/need factors. The goal of the LSI-OR is to target services relative to risk, in essence concentrating increased resources on higher risk offenders.

Assessments are multi-dimensional and are not restricted by a defined clinical perspective. Inherently, the LSI-OR requires a trained, professional evaluator. As case managers, PPOs fulfill this role. POAO emphasizes that this instrument is a tool meant to support, rather than replace, professional discretion. As research indicates, PPOs are the professionals best able to predict recidivism.

Practical Administration of the LSI-OR

POAO noted in previous position papers that inconsistent training and interpretation of the LSI have hindered its effectiveness. In light of enhanced technology, there is a greater risk that the integrity of the LSI-OR will be diluted if unqualified staff are conducting assessment interviews and inputting this information onto the Offender Management System (OMS).

It is recommended that the Ministry develop a "checklist" for categories of the LSI-OR to maximize the potential for information gathering and to ensure its objective and consistent usage. Such a strategy would provide a common language for all who administer the LSI-OR. It would further act as a reference for inexperienced staff.

Assessment as a Dynamic Process

On a practical level, assessment is an ongoing and dynamic process. From initial contacts with offenders through to the termination of community supervision, the purpose of assessment is meant to determine timing, focus, format, and content. The following points refer to specifics relevant to assessment within the context of the PPO function:

■ **Court Reports:**

Pre-Sentence and Pre-Disposition Reports have a two-fold purpose: firstly, to assist the Court in arriving at an appropriate disposition; secondly, to provide background for the case management of the offender. Relevant legislation recognizes that PPOs are the sole authority for completing such court-ordered reports. While these reports have not traditionally been couched in the specific language of risk/need assessment, PPOs offer impressionistic data regarding problem areas which contributed to offending behaviour and recommend relevant conditions, should community supervision be deemed appropriate. When suggesting specific conditions, PPOs are sensitive to the needs of the offender and the availability of community resources. Frequently, resource availability does not correspond with offender need. There may be some merit in incorporating concepts of Client Specific Planning (CSP) into Court Report formats, particularly since studies have demonstrated that the judiciary responds favourably to the inclusion of specific plans governing the management of the offender in the community. Recent reforms to the Criminal Code related to the requirement of consent in imposing treatment conditions are a step in that direction. However, this suggestion is offered with the cautionary note that workload implications may be involved in CSP since officers would be required to research the community for programming options.

■ **Initial Assessment:**

POAO endorses continuity of service as a fundamental principle underlying intervention with offenders. Assessment is an on-going function which is intrinsically linked to case supervision. Differentiating the two functions is counter-productive. Assessments conducted at the initial interview may not be entirely representative of the client profile given lack of sufficient information. Prior to the development of a rapport with the PPO, an offender may be resistant to disclosing necessary information. Collateral contacts and essential documentation are critical to a thorough assessment. Case standards regarding time frames must be reflective of these realities.

The Ministry is encouraged to continue efforts at both the local and corporate level to ensure effective information sharing with key stakeholders in a timely fashion. POAO strongly supports the creation of an integrated database accessible to MSGCS, MCSS, Ontario Board of Parole, police agencies and the Courts.

The Association also recommends that preliminary assessments be completed in a timely manner with resultant scores entered onto the Offender Management System. Such scores may be altered as additional information becomes available. Timely preliminary assessments could be facilitated through the designation of intake days where feasible.

Enhanced OMS capabilities could provide a standardized format for initial assessment. As part of the case planning process, the logging of information relevant to risk/need factors in an automated method would facilitate the sharing of key information among Ministry staff by providing a narrative understanding of the specifics underlying the LSI-OR rating. Under the major groupings in the LSI-OR, a section could be created to include a qualitative interpretation of risk/need factors and the source of information, thereby enhancing its credibility. With the LSI-OR used as a tool in the case management process, supplementary sections should be available for the purposes of recording "override" rationale. The Association notes that the existing supplementary sections have limited applicability to community corrections given that the format is institutionally driven in capturing information necessary for classification reports.

■ **Case Management:**

In the process of case management, standards require a formal re-assessment at six-month intervals including any alterations to the LSI-OR and case management plan. Substantive changes in client status may merit a re-evaluation of the LSI-OR rating and the supervision plan prior to the semi-annual review. However, such reviews should be at the discretion of the supervising PPO rather than mandated by policy. These changes would have varying degrees of significance according to the nature of the client profile and the realities of the catchment area.

Effective community supervision of offenders carefully monitors changes in the offender's risk of recidivism. Assessment of dynamic factors is conducted during individual reporting sessions. Therefore, the supervising officer is best able to determine the impact of intervention on risk/need factors. Changes in client circumstances, which may prompt a crisis and perhaps a revision in classification levels, render the offender potentially vulnerable to motivational efforts and targeted interventions by the PPO. In this context, continuity of service allows for an efficient and expedient response to risks presented by clients.

■ **Assessment of Special Need Offenders:**

POAO has traditionally highlighted the fact that the LSI is not an accurate assessment tool for determining risks associated with specific offender groups. Impaired drivers, domestic violence and sexual offenders are some of the client groups whose scores may not correspond to level of risk to re-offend.

Notably, recent research in the areas of domestic and sexual violence has resulted in the availability of quantitative assessment instruments which can assist PPOs in

determining a more accurate profile of these offender types. For example, in cases involving spousal abuse, conditions regarding association with the victim are often left to the discretion of the PPO. Generally, information available to determine the appropriateness of contact consists of comments made by the offender, police, victim, and, if applicable, treatment professionals. A tool which has demonstrated validity would provide a useful guide in making risk management decisions.

The instruments referred to above should be accessible to PPOs for contentious cases. Many of these assessment tools were developed as a checklist; a means of ensuring that pertinent information is considered and weighed by the evaluators. Given that information gathered for purposes of the LSI-OR will overlap with the data requirements of other assessment tools, it is anticipated that completion of these instruments would not be of inordinate length or complexity.

CASE MANAGEMENT:

Due to increases in caseloads, workloads, administrative requirements, and the complexity of the client population, the PPO has been rendered “desk bound”. Community corrections has become “office assembly line corrections” in some jurisdictions, particularly urban areas. It is the Association’s position that changes must occur to policies, standards, and directives to allow the PPO to return to the community. In recent years, MSGCS has released numerous directives, reactive in nature, in an effort to become increasingly accountable. However, in many cases, these directives have only served to increase the PPO’s administrative burden and divert the focus away from client intervention. Ironically, some directives have emerged due to the fact that PPOs cannot comply with numerous administrative demands already in place (i.e. incident reports). The Association recommends that the directives process be examined and altered, as will be discussed subsequently in this paper. Several other administrative procedures require modification to enable PPOs to focus their time and resources on intervention with clients, victims, and community liaison.

The following are case management strategies which would facilitate enhanced client intervention and public safety:

■ Low risk/ACD clients:

In this level, the PPO must retain professional discretion to determine the appropriate level of intervention. Current case standards which require the client to report until all conditions are fulfilled are, in some cases, unnecessary. For example, a client who has only a condition to report and pay restitution over a two-year period, could be placed on ACD status should the PPO determine that no benefit is to be derived from further reporting. The case would still be monitored by the PPO and enforced if necessary. While the Association acknowledges that some low risk/need cases may not require reporting in person, we emphasize that other cases in this category require intervention due to offender needs. Clients deserve some level of service to ensure that their needs

are addressed. As discovered by Koehler and Lindner (1992), scarcity of resources has led to reserving them for cases classified as high-risk. Not only may public safety be jeopardized by reduced levels of supervision, but it is not uncommon for the 'low risk' probationer to receive neither the supervision the public expects, nor the treatment services the offender deserves. The supervising PPO is in the best position to determine the most appropriate intervention for the client, not standards dictating intervention levels based on scores of an assessment tool.

For cases placed on ACD, the Association supports the use of a reporting form to be sent to the office monthly, allowing basic offender information to be monitored. Since the implementation of Bill C-41, probation orders now contain a statutory condition that the offender notify the PPO of changes to name, address, or occupation. It is important that this information not be lost through lack of contact. Frequently, PPOs receive queries from police or other authorities regarding an offender's whereabouts or activities. Such reporting forms would enable the PPO to be apprised of basic client information without providing unnecessary intervention. The Association emphasizes that offenders placed on ACD status should remain on the supervising PPO's caseload.

■ **Educational Groups:**

Educational groups which target criminogenic needs could be facilitated by PPOs in conjunction with community experts where available. Many PPOs have experience in group facilitation in areas including impaired driving, anger management, life skills, and shoplifting. Where the offender's risk/need level allows, attendance at an in-house group would fulfill the reporting requirement. The benefits of in-house programming include the development of the PPO's skills, partnerships with community agencies, cost-savings, and reliable testimony regarding non-compliance charges. PPOs have experienced difficulty obtaining accurate evidence and reliable witnesses from some community agencies in the past. Utilizing a fellow PPO as a witness to program completion addresses issues of reliability and accountability. Additionally, linking with a local treatment agency and utilizing staff expertise is beneficial to the Ministry and the community agency.

Similar in-house programs exist in certain areas, but should be expanded on a province-wide basis where resources and personnel exist. Re-investment in training is required to facilitate PPOs involvement in this type of intervention.

The Association emphasizes that, in addition to attendance at such groups, the offender must retain his/her PPO. Educational groups often assist in conquering denial and preparing the offender to commence individual therapy/treatment. It is imperative that the PPO continue to supervise the client and provide for such opportunities. Where no other risks/needs are identified, group attendance could fulfill the reporting condition and ACD could be utilized. Again, the PPO must have the discretion to determine level of intervention.

■ Attendance Centres:

To further involve the PPO with the community, and the community with corrections, attendance centres should be established utilizing schools, community centres or youth centres. Protocols could be developed through collaborative efforts with existing personnel at such facilities. Responsibility for monitoring offender attendance and participation would be rotated among PPOs. Activities would include lifeskills, guest speakers, employment workshops, sports, or community assistance. Implementation of this proposal would increase the community presence of the PPO, and encourage the offender to make more constructive use of leisure time. Clients would be mandated to attend at a frequency determined by the PPO, depending on risk/need factors and current level of constructive activity. The offender's reporting requirement could be fulfilled by alternating office reporting and attendance centre participation. Additionally, fiscal savings could be realized by utilizing such a program as an alternative to custody for non-violent offenders. Any savings achieved should be re-allocated to community corrections. The Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton Police Youth Centre, a nationally acclaimed crime prevention program, provides a viable illustration of this concept.

Implementation of the aforementioned suggestions would result in the PPO having fewer office interviews, as reporting would be supplemented with group or attendance centre participation. Time saved through these processes would allow the PPO to concentrate on medium to high-risk offenders, allowing for increased community presence.

■ High-risk offenders:

For certain high-risk cases, the Association strongly recommends that protocols be developed with local police forces enabling PPOs to perform "drop-ins" on offenders in the community. Due to the sheer volume of interviews and administrative requirements, the present system does not allow for sufficient community monitoring of the high-risk offender, leaving the PPO in a position to rely on the client's self-report. Exacerbating this situation is the fact that many high-risk offenders do not have family or other community members to serve as collateral contacts. To enhance public safety, and the credibility of community corrections, this situation must be rectified. Sexual offenders, for example, with conditions prohibiting contact with children, must be monitored in the community to ensure compliance.

The Association recommends that PPOs develop a schedule of "drop-in" days each month to conduct home visits accompanied by another PPO and police officer(s). This process would vary depending on the characteristics of the catchment area. Clearly, training and safety would have to be addressed prior to implementation. The benefits of this proposal include more expedient enforcement of conditions (ie. substance consumption, non-association, residence) and reliability of witnesses. The present circumstances render enforcement of "community" conditions impossible unless a

family/community member is willing to provide evidence in court. PPOs have experienced many cases where enforcement cannot be initiated due to witness reluctance. Crime prevention would be enhanced, and victims would have more confidence in the ability of PPOs to protect them following the implementation of this intervention strategy.

■ **Technology and supervision:**

For certain offenders, the Ministry is encouraged to investigate the utilization of tools available through technological advancement (ie. substance use, medication testing). Increasingly, probation orders include conditions requiring an offender to submit to drug/alcohol testing; however, current Ministry policy does not allow for such monitoring. In certain cases, this is a hindrance to effective intervention resulting in increased risk to the community. Certain tools, such as electronic monitoring, may enhance the effectiveness of supervision of the very high-risk offender, provided that treatment and personal intervention are still included. Petersilia (1996) found that in programs where offenders received surveillance and participated in relevant treatment, recidivism rates declined by 20-30 percent. The Association cautions, however, that any tool included in the supervision plan should function to enhance supervision only, not to replace the PPO. Personal intervention by the PPO and sufficient community resources must exist in order for supervision to be effective. Mclvor (1992) discovered in his study of intensive probation that an emphasis on control in the absence of attention to the offenders' underlying needs and availability of resources to address these needs is largely counter-productive.

■ **The Mentally Disordered Offender:**

The government's initiative to de-institutionalize the mentally ill in the past two decades has been accompanied by an inadequate investment in community resources to support these individuals. Current MSGCS statistics indicate that approximately 12% of offenders under community supervision suffer from some type of mental or emotional disorder. However, Wormith and McKeague (1996) found in a random sample of probationers that 18.9% collectively met criteria suggestive of serious mental disorder. Comparatively, the rate of disorder among community correctional clients is high, considering that only 0.75% of Ontario's population have a serious mental disorder.

Current literature recognizes the association between criminality, particularly violent crime, and mental disorder. Notably, epidemiological studies originating in the United States indicate that severely disordered individuals (i.e. manic-depressive psychosis) are six times more likely than non-disordered persons to be violent. Abusers of alcohol are twelve times more likely, while drug abusers reflect rates of fifteen times more than the average population. The probability of violence is accumulative with combined symptomatology.

Further exacerbating this risk level is the fact that mentally disordered offenders are faced with a lack of community resources including appropriate residential facilities,

programming, crisis intervention and other community supports. The current system of housing these individuals in boarding homes and addressing crises in a reactionary manner places both the offender and the community at risk. In order to provide improved client supervision and enhanced community safety, changes to the management of the mentally ill offender must occur. Trends have demonstrated that decreases in the institutional infrastructure of the mental health system have resulted in the referral of the mentally ill to the criminal justice system. As a mental health policy in Ontario, deinstitutionalization reduced the number of psychiatric beds by 15% between 1980 and 1990 (Wormith and McKeague, 1996). The declared intention of the current provincial government is to generate further fiscal savings through the continued closure of residential services for the mentally ill. POAO does not support such a proposal particularly since past bed closures have not been accompanied by adequate investment in community resources.

Wormith and McKeague (1996) noted that many disordered offenders do not receive the services in the community that their PPOs indicate are required. Client consent and the availability of appropriate services for correctional clients were identified as the primary factors contributing to this shortfall. PPOs have long struggled with the frustrations of providing services to a less than voluntary clientele. Ironically, certain provisions of the Mental Health Act circumvent the PPO's best efforts to supervise these offenders. Consequently, offenders do not receive appropriate treatment from mental health professionals until a serious incident has occurred.

We recommend that the Ministry lobby for sufficient levels of forensic care, and influence changes to the Mental Health Act to facilitate more timely and effective treatment for the mentally ill offender.

A recent inquest into a murder committed by a former probation client included a recommendation involving the imposition of community treatment orders. Similar to disposition orders currently available under the criminal justice system, the requirement for a community treatment order would be assessed by a body akin to the Consent and Capacity Board. Conditions governing treatment and functions of daily life would be imposed. Non-compliance with conditions would result in that individual being returned to the psychiatric facility or correctional institution. Considering the substantial cuts anticipated through mental health reform, there is a requirement to replace the security of the hospital setting for the mentally ill with the security and support of the community. Through community treatment orders, the mentally ill would no longer have to become criminalized to receive care (Verdict of the Coroner's Inquest into the Death of Brian Smith).

In the absence of any amendments to the Mental Health Act, protocols could be developed at the local level to enable clients at risk to receive timely, suitable intervention. Through enhanced communication between police agencies, mental health professionals/facilities, and PPOs, clients could be treated without having to "wait" for a serious incident to occur. The current level of communication between mental health facilities and probation services is inadequate. For example, a mentally ill

probation client could be hospitalized without the PPO ever being notified. Logistically, there should be a system in place for institutions to verify whether in fact they are dealing with a correctional client. Probation Officers possess a wealth of offender information which should be included in his/her assessment and treatment. Local areas could identify certain police officers and institution admitting staff to establish a strategy regarding crisis probation cases. This would reduce the incidence of clients “slipping through the cracks” and important information not being conveyed.

■ **Volunteers:**

POAO supports the use of volunteers to provide additional community support to our clients, not to perform core functions. As stated in POAO’s Standards and Expectations Committee Report (1990), volunteers should act in a supportive role in assisting the PPO to meet the needs of individual clients. The Association opposes the use of volunteers for functions including report writing, monitoring, collateral contacts, and case supervision. Community members who wish to volunteer often have experience or special skills that complement the intervention provided by the PPO. For example, in an area with a large immigrant population, volunteers can provide orientation, linkages with agencies, translation, and support. Volunteers can also assist needy clients with obtaining identification, housing, employment, and improving literacy skills. They have also provided great support to victims by accompanying them to court. Other areas where volunteers can assist are in health education, care during pregnancy, nutrition, and budgeting. A volunteer should not be in any position involving enforcement for various reasons including liability, accountability, safety, training, experience, professionalism, confidentiality, and the short-term nature of the volunteer’s commitment. In any case where the volunteer is the witness to non-compliance, the charge is lost if that volunteer is not in court to provide evidence. The Association’s model of community corrections includes volunteers, but only in the positions described above. Volunteers should not be providing their services solely with the hopes of obtaining future employment, nor should they be used as a “recruiting force” for the Ministry.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION:

The Association finds that the current level of fiscal resources devoted to community corrections is inadequate. In the 1996-97 fiscal year, the Correctional Service Division allocated \$107.5 million (20%) out of a \$530.5 million budget towards community supervision (MSGCS, 1997). Yet, on any given day, 87% of the Ministry’s clientele are being supervised in the community. 77% of the CSD budget is spent on incarcerating only 13% of the offenders. If the Ministry is serious about instituting a community correctional focus then the necessary resources need to be diverted to the community to realize this direction (Organization Renewal Project, 1995).

In addition to examining the disproportionate level of funding within the Division, the overall treatment and involvement of PPOs must improve. As noted in the

Organizational Renewal Project Summary, focus group participants felt that the Ministry's Mission Statement regarding the importance of human resources is hypocritical. Staff need to be treated with respect, receive recognition for their ideas, and be involved in the decision-making process. The consensus from focus group sessions was that the Correctional Service Division lacks recognition, reward and incentive systems for its employees. POAO concurs with these findings and notes that the Ministry's treatment of employees has resulted in low morale, apathy and feelings of hopelessness among front-line professionals. The current environment of the Ministry is toxic. We strongly believe that these issues must be addressed in order for the Division to have staff who feel empowered, supported, and respected.

Training of PPOs is another area which desperately requires attention. The Division currently allocates 0.5% of the budget to training. This is clearly irresponsible given the recommendations of numerous inquests indicating that enhanced training is essential. As PPOs deal with increasingly complex clients and crisis situations, relevant training must be provided to enhance public safety. Members of the public have become increasingly litigious, and inadequate training of officers is emerging as an issue. Undoubtedly the Ministry has an obligation to the public to ensure that PPOs are adequately trained.

This issue has arisen in a current Toronto lawsuit involving the police shooting of Wayne Williams, who suffered from schizophrenia. The Williams' statement of claim indicates that the police officers "lacked reasonable skill, ability and training" (Boyle, 1998). The Organizational Renewal Project also found this to be an important issue: the general consensus of all regions was that training is not supported or adequately funded and that access to training programs is not always fair, equitable and timely (1995). The Association has gone on record on numerous occasions indicating that the current level of training is insufficient.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION PRACTICES:

Evaluation is a necessary activity designed to measure the effectiveness of an organization. In the context of Probation and Parole Services, formal evaluation procedures are triggered by annual workload audits, reviews of level 1 parole violators, systemic reviews of parole cases, and file audits of contentious issue clients. In general, such reviews examine the administrative, legal, casework, and community involvement components of the PPO function. However, not considered in this framework are means by which the effectiveness of officers' interventions may be measured. Given the absence of measurable objectives governing professional intervention, there exists a wide variation amongst PPOs in intervention practices aimed at engaging and providing clients with rehabilitative and developmental opportunities. Many factors over which PPOs have little control, such as high caseloads, limited resources, inadequate training, and an absence of clear goals, affect quality of service. Since the interplay of such factors will influence and define intervention approaches, judgements on the part of officers must be grounded firmly in basic ethical principles.

Current evaluation systems fail to reconcile a correlation between principles of professional ethics and standards for professional practice.

The Ministry is encouraged to develop employee performance evaluation, audit and review procedures which balance compliance to directives, policies, and standards with workloads and available resources. Consideration should be given to appraisal methods of other professionals who influence human behaviour in order to develop a relevant evaluation tool for measuring the effectiveness of PPO intervention practices. Also, the role of the PPO is specialized to the extent that specific officers assume liaison duties and performance measures should be reflective of these functions. Lastly, the Ministry should annually conduct a systemic review of issues that consistently arise in audits, reviews, and performance evaluations. Resource allocation, the practical application of policy decisions, morale, training needs and other factors that inhibit professional service delivery must be considered in such a review.

In recent years, the onslaught of policies and directives have required PPOs to meet increased levels of accountability. These demands have translated into a preoccupation with administrative requirements thereby rendering secondary the rehabilitative needs of the client. This situation threatens public safety as the role of the PPO becomes focused on administrative procedures instead of offender intervention. An onerous workload limits the PPO's ability to effectively follow these directives and staff morale is decreased by the threat of discipline for non-compliance. The consequence is a perception amongst PPOs that the corporate direction is punitive, reactionary, and autocratic in nature, with minimal consultation conducted at the field level. Furthermore, the Ministry is exposed to liability if the implementation of policy decisions at the operational level is done in a negligent manner (Solomon, 1997).

It is incumbent upon the Ministry to ensure that its directives and policies are realistic in their application, and do not inhibit or obstruct its primary goal of providing safe and quality supervision of community offenders. Improved communication may serve to ameliorate problematic issues arising from policy directives. The Correctional Services Division should renew efforts to develop an inclusive milieu enabling PPOs to provide regular input into professional issues. This would be a positive first step to improving staff morale.

The Association notes that frequently, Ministry initiatives lack a proper evaluation process. The development of the Strict Discipline Facility should have been a pilot project subject to rigorous evaluation following a substantive time period. However, after only a few months in operation, the Ministry announced its intention to extend this philosophy to all young offender facilities. POAO views this type of program implementation as irresponsible given that effectiveness has not been measured. Therefore, the extension of this philosophy is premature.

CONCLUSION:

Community corrections is at a crossroads. Diminished resources, political agenda, and offender complexity have stretched the system to its breaking point. Administrative demands have detracted from the practitioners best efforts to conduct effective intervention in the community. As an Association, we advocate for enhanced community safety through the development of community partnerships, improved educational and training opportunities, and appropriate resourcing. Probation/Parole Officers must have a greater presence in their communities. No longer is it feasible for the PPO to practice his/her profession from a “desk-bound” environment. Caseloads must reflect the realities associated with research-sanctioned strategies. It is irresponsible for the Ministry to purport that the current situation is acceptable. Equally unacceptable is any notion that supports the further elimination of resources from the community. The Association strongly recommends that the Ministry closely examine its fiscal allocations and make adjustments in a responsible and progressive manner. After all, if we are truly concerned with community safety, commitments must be made to invest in the community. As professionals, we are committed to providing the best possible services to the people of Ontario resulting in the promotion of public safety and the rehabilitation of the offender population. We trust that this paper has addressed those issues and intend to provide continued input into the development of an effective model for community corrections.

Prepared by the Community Corrections Model Committee:

Cathy Hutchison - Chair
Penny Arp
Bob Eaton
Colleen Hamilton
Heather Kinnear

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andrews, D. A. and Leschied, Alan. Youth at Risk: A Review of Ontario Young Offenders, Programs, and Literature that Supports Effective Intervention. August 1992

Boyle, Theresa and Vincent, Donovan. "Madness", Toronto Star. January 11, 1998.

Eaves, Derek; Hart, Stephen; Krop, Randall and Webster, Christopher. Manual for the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (2nd edition). British Columbia Institute on Family Violence. 1995

Jennings, Kathryn. Literature Review prepared for the Probation Officers Association of Ontario. March 1997

Jones, Marylouise and Lurigio, Arthur."Ethical Considerations in Probation Practice". Perspectives. Summer 1997

Koehler, R. and Lindner, C. Alternative Incarceration: An Inevitable Response to Institutional Overcrowding. Federal Probation, vol. 56.

KPMG Associates. Correctional Management Report prepared for Correctional Services Division, Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services. October 1996

McIvor, G. "Intensive Probation: Does More Mean Better?" Probation Journal, vol 39, pp. 2-7.

Ministry of Attorney General, Corrections Branch (British Columbia). Sex Offender Risk Assessment. SORA (96/08/30)

Ministry of Attorney General, Corrections Branch (British Columbia). Spousal Assault Risk Assessment. SARA (96/08/30)

Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ontario). Risk/Need Assessment and Case Planning. Information Session Handout.

Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services. Level of Service Inventory (O.R.) Training guide. 1995

Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services. Organizational Renewal Project Summary of Focus Group Findings. 1995

Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services. Partner in Ontario's Criminal Justice System. 1997

Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services, Ontario Public Service Employees Union and Probation Officers Association of Ontario. Workload Management Task Force Report. 1994

Petersilia, J. "A Crime Control Rationale for Reinvesting in Community Corrections". Perspectives. Spring 1996

Probation Officers Association of Ontario. Standards and Expectations Committee Report. 1990

Solomon, Robert. Legal Implications of Proposed Changes in Correctional Services. Research Memorandum. May 1997.

Verdict of Coroner's Jury regarding Inquest into the Death of Brian Smith, November 25, 1997.