

Probation Conference in Poland

By Donald G. Evans

In response to an invitation from the Association of Probation Officers of Wielkopolska, the Polish Ministry of Justice and Adam Mickiewicz University at Poznan, the National Association of Probation Executives selected a delegation of probation and judicial professionals to participate in the International Probation Conference. The conference was held in Mielno, Poland (situated on the Baltic coast), from May 24-26, 2006. The purpose of the conference was to examine and explore the current status of probation and its prospects for the future given public expectations. The organizers of the conference wanted to make it a truly international event; there were participants from the United Kingdom, as well as the North American delegation organized by NAPE. Other participants included members of the Polish Prison Service, Police Service and the Judiciary. Academics involved in re-socialization and education studies and research, as well as representatives of social service agencies that work with local probation also participated in the conference.

Peter Burczyk, president of the Association of Probation Officers of Wielkopolska and a probation administrator in Poznan, chaired the conference. The conference touched on a number of issues and concerns that related to the current state of probation and looked at prospects for the future. The conference was permeated by an atmosphere of change. The question left hanging for participants to reflect on was "change to what" in terms of the structure, mandate or legal responsibilities of probation.

The following five themes emerged from the presentations and discussions and relate to changes that are occurring both locally and globally in approaches to probation.

Judicial Perspectives On Community Corrections

The judicial representatives talked about the need to strengthen the judicial system and to develop a more efficient trial process. They noted that there would need to be changes in administrative and procedural functions in order to have an effective criminal justice system. The suggestion was made by way of example that legislation will need to be created to support such innovations as electronic monitoring of offenders. The members of the judiciary stated that they were pleased to be included in the conference and had a sincere desire to learn from other participants what would be necessary for the continued growth of probation in Poland.

Approaches to The Treatment of Offenders

Poland is similar to other jurisdictions in the search for new ideas and approaches to the management and treatment of offenders being supervised in the community. The presenters and participants were interested in exploring the following issues: What kinds of practices support rehabilitation? What types of programs or regimes will enable offenders to break out of a criminal mind set? Will the new behavioral approaches provide a lasting solution? And what about the specific, concrete needs of offenders, such as money, work, education and stable family relations? There was some concern that probation agencies currently concentrate too much on repressive activities and not enough on education and assistance to enable offenders to live responsibly. One of the presenters noted that the notion or idea of re-socialization is the crucial point in looking at what probation can do for and with offenders. Another presenter noted that probation is more than a legal act and that the criminal justice system needs to find

ways to provide more than punishing sanctions if it is serious about changing behavior.

Societal Expectations Regarding Probation

Probation agencies that develop evidence-based programs and target offenders with a high risk of re-offending (the small percentage of active and repeat offenders who commit a disproportionate number of offences) are more likely to see reductions in re-offending in their communities. Dealing with these chronic offenders will enable probation to make a major contribution to the safety of the community. Fewer offenders re-offending will change the volume of gang-related activities and drug involvement will decrease in the local community.

How Returning Offenders Are Supervised

Overcrowded prisons are a major concern of the Polish Prison Service and they were particularly interested in exploring the role and responsibility of the probation officer in the release system and in the processes for prisoner rehabilitation in the community. It was clear that the Polish authorities are supportive of conditional release schemes that provide supervision in the community by probation officers. The participants demonstrated a keen interest in what was being done in the United States regarding reentry initiatives and in the United Kingdom with their concept of "end to end offender management," which links prison and probation efforts more closely together.

Probation/Police Relationships

Two presentations on this theme were given. One addressed the North American perspective and the other reviewed current efforts in Poland

between its probation and police services. It seems clear that if probation deals with the few high-risk re-offenders in a community setting, then a partnership between these two entities would be essential. It is also a means of grounding probation in the local community and being seen as an agent of public safety. There was general agreement that the partnering of probation and police is a key element in the provision of public security services.

This conference once again reinforced the value of information and program exchanges between various countries. The dialogues that occur and the networks that are established are mutually beneficial. The eagerness to learn, the openness to new ideas and the intellectual rigor of the Polish probation officers who were in attendance was impressive. They were a well-qualified and well-trained talented staff who, through their questions and in discussions, demonstrated an ability to take information from the international presenters and evaluate it in light of their own cultural and legal settings.

After the conference, the North American delegation visited a court, prison and two probation offices and continued the dialogue with Polish probation staff. Probation on this side of the Atlantic has much to learn from the approaches being taken by the Polish Probation Service. The hallmark of the Polish Probation Service is its ability to creatively maintain its rehabilitative ideals while enforcing probation conditions that meet the welfare and community safety goals of probation supervision.

The National Association of Probation Executives (an affiliate of ACA) recognized that a globalized world needs a more globalized probation philosophy. One approach to the development of such a philosophy is through exchanges and the creation of international networks. NAPE has been attempting to reach out internationally through the efforts of Dan Beto, a past president and current editor of *Executive Exchange*, and building networks in Poland is an auspicious start.

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Research Notes

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effects of placing more and more drug and low-level offenders in prison may be offsetting the crime-reducing effect of incarcerating more violent and property offenders.

In contrast to more recent studies, earlier research indicating a link between prison population growth and crime reduction was conducted in an era before the prison net had widened to embrace a larger number and proportion of drug and low-level offenders. As a result of transitions in the nature of the prison population, contemporary prison population growth not only has less influence on violent and property crime rates, it also has led to a series of dynamics that may have actually caused crime to increase in some communities.

Like all other public policies, the trend toward collective incapacitation has had an impact — although, perhaps, not one that was either anticipated or desired. At least in part, that is because “even the best intentions are doomed to failure in the absence of informed decisions based on projections of expected impact.”⁸ Essentially, sophisticated problems are not solved by simplistic solutions.

ENDNOTES

¹Stinchcomb, Jeanne B. 2005. *Corrections: Past, present, and future*. Lanham, Md.: American Correctional Association.

²Camp, Camille Graham, ed. 2003. *The 2002 corrections yearbook: Adult corrections*. Middletown, Conn.: Criminal Justice Institute.

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³Marvel, T. and C. Moody. 1994. Prison population growth and crime reduction. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 10:109-140.

Shepherd, J. 2006. The imprisonment puzzle: Understanding how prison growth affects crime. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 5(2):285-298.

⁴Petersilia, Joan. 1992. Building more prison cells won't make a safer society. *Corrections Today*, 54(8):168-170.

⁵Sykes, Gresham M. 1958. *The society of captives: A study of a maximum security prison*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

⁶Official crime rates throughout the country are based on an index of violent and property crimes compiled by local police departments in compliance with the FBI's uniform crime reporting system. If the index and resulting crime rates incorporated drug use or sales, findings on the effect of prison growth on crime rates might well differ.

⁷Mauer, Marc. 1999. *Race to incarcerate*. New York: The Free Press.

⁸Stinchcomb, 2005.

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