

PROBATION/POLICE PARTNERSHIPS

By

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Introduction

Before beginning my presentation I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for the opportunity to share my experiences with probation partnerships and to visit your lovely country! I also wish to commend you for convening a conference on such a critical topic as *Probation Today and Perspectives for the Future Based on Social Expectations*. I trust that my comments on the role probation and police partnerships play in the provision of public safety services will be helpful to you in the furtherance of your objectives in the delivery of probation services.

Why Partnerships?

There are three major reasons why probation/police partnerships have been developed in North America. The first rationale relates to the problem of violent crime, particularly in certain sections of large urban centers. The strain placed on local probation agencies to adequately supervise high-risk violent offenders dictated an examination of new ways of providing supervision to this targeted group of offenders. It was also clear that traditional probation responses, such as reporting to a probation office, were not working. The public expectation that the government provide a “seamless web” of public safety also suggested the need to examine how probation goes about its work. Finally, budgetary concerns also played a significant role in the search for new and more effective means to supervise high-risk and violent offenders. Serious resource issues plagued probation agencies and it seemed logical to attempt to pool resources for the common good, in this instance the joining forces with local police to enhance public safety as it related to the reduction of re-offending by high-risk offenders on community supervision.

For the past decade, in both the United States and Canada, probation agencies have been exploring the possibilities and implementing promising approaches to the supervision of high-risk offenders in community settings. From team supervision models, intensive supervision strategies, use of advance technological aids, to the development of either formal or informal partnerships with local police agencies probation has sought solutions to the problem of supervising high-risk offenders.

Reinvention of Probation

In the North American context, a major movement in probation has been the effort to reinvent the notion of probation based on evidence of effectiveness. This has led to the development of at least three interesting approaches to the delivery of probation services, and in some cases has led to a combining of approaches in an effort to develop a more robust probation presence.

The first of these approaches I have called *risk-based probation* and it is probably best explained by looking at three elements used in supervision of offenders. This approach relies on the actuarial assessment of risk and is committed to the targeting of high-risk offenders for close supervision. Two other aspects of this approach is that it is pro-active, that is it doesn't rely on the offender reporting but seeks out the offender in his or her community context, and secondly, it is anticipatory in that, based on assessments and intelligence from community contacts, it seeks to intervene before a new offence is committed. This implies a higher rate of technical violations for this supervised group of offenders. This approach has also been labelled the "broken windows model" after the concept that by dealing with the little details that signal crime and disorder in a community public safety can be enhanced. Another way to look at this idea is to see it as a disruption of "routines" that encourage offenders to re-offend. This approach places an emphasis on offender accountability.

As a result of a major emphasis on looking for programs that are effective in the reduction of re-offending, a number of probation agencies have begun to implement what is commonly referred to as the "what works" agenda, based on Canadian research on program

interventions. I have called this reinvention effort *rehabilitative probation*, where the emphasis is on assessment of not only static risk factors but on criminogenic needs, that if met would reduce the risk of re-offending. The main programs being used in this context are cognitive behavioural.

The third approach being instituted in some probation agencies I have called *restorative probation*, which has a strong emphasis on services to victims and seeks to involve the community in the management of offenders in the local community. Usually, but not exclusively, this approach seems to be more prevalent in work with young offenders.

I do not wish to spend too much time discussing the last two approaches, but feel compel to note that as I have stated earlier, a probation agency may attempt all three approaches depending on the needs and distribution of cases under supervision. No one approach can satisfy the complexities of supervising offenders in community settings, especially if public safety is the ultimate goal. But for my purpose in dealing with probation/police partnerships in the supervision of violent high-risk offenders, it is best located in the risk-based probation approach.

The authors of the monographs on *Broken Windows Probation* have highlighted the following key strategies for a probation that works:

- The importance of placing public safety as the priority of the probation.
- The requirement that offenders be supervised in their community and not the probation office.
- The need to find ways to rationally allocate resources.
- The requirement to provide for consistent enforcement of probation conditions and a quick response to technical violations.
- The need to develop partnerships with other law enforcement or social service agencies in the local community.
- Implement and further develop evidence-based approaches to offender programming.
- Establish performance-based measures for probation, adopt a results oriented culture, and welcome evaluation of probation programs.

- All of this requires leadership, therefore cultivate and develop strong leaders in your probation agency.

A quick review of the factors these authors believe lead to a probation service that is active, effective, and efficient indicates that in the case of violent high-risk offenders being supervised in the community, the most promising approach is the development of partnerships with local police agencies.

Let us now turn to three aspects of developing and maintaining effective partnerships.

Partnerships

The three key characteristics of effective partnerships involve attention to the development of a clear vision of what the partnership can accomplish, how the agency will work towards meeting the objectives of the partnership, and gives thought to what impact is expected of the partnership. Again these three elements are:

- **Vision:** Successful organizations working together create a compelling picture of the possibilities of working in partnership. A number of probation/police agencies have created a vision of the possibilities of what could be done with collaboration and cooperation between their respected agencies. The vision should clearly state what the partners want to accomplish and how partnering their resources will achieve the ends desired.
- **Intimacy:** The work that these agencies are doing could not be accomplished without developing close working relations based on sharing of resources and information and on mutual respect and trust for each others agency. It also involves a solid commitment to specific goals (public safety, supervision of high-risk offenders) and to the partnership itself.
- **Impact:** It should be remember that partnering is only worthwhile if it achieves outcomes (results) that add real productivity and value to the enterprise of providing community safety. To achieve this impact will require an action plan of how the partners will accomplish the ends desired. The plan will set out the goals and objectives,

responsibilities, resources being committed and rules for the partnership.

I would now like to briefly discuss some elements of successful partnering.

Successful Partnering

The following characteristics are indicative of what needs to be done to ensure successful partnering:

- The partners need to clearly identify the results they desire from the partnering venture.
- Partners who agree to use their resources to make a difference in their community are more likely to be successful.
- Jointly assess the community needs and the needs of the partnership to deliver the agreed upon services will increase the chances for success.
- The importance of clarifying the rules upon which the partnership will operate is a key to success. (More on this later, when we discuss protocols.)
- It will be important to publicly recognize achievements of the partnership.
- Successful partnerships are able to make ongoing corrections in order to facilitate improvements in service delivery.
- A climate or culture that evidences a willingness to take calculated risks is important.
- Another characteristic of successful partnering is the encouragement that is given to creativity and innovation.
- Partnering between agencies can lead to a productive challenging of each other to improve.
- It is important that the results of the partnering program be evaluated and it is also important to evaluate the partnership itself.

Finally, on this point a gentle reminder that successful partnering will require time to plan effectively, to train staff, to practice partnering techniques, to manage obstacles and disagreements, and to manage resistance to new ways of supervising offenders.

Before going on to a discussion of protocols, let me digress a little to give you some examples of probation/police partnerships and the specific targets they sought to impact. The targets were:

- In Canada, they have been used to supervise high-risk parole or statutory released offenders.
- In the United States they have been used for curfew monitoring of high-risk juvenile offenders, parolees, and probationers.
- In the Netherlands they have been used for direct supervision of high-risk offenders.
- In United Kingdom they have been used to supervision prolific offenders and in burglary reduction programs.
- In Canada, United States and the United Kingdom they are also employed in the supervision of sex offenders either on probation or parole.

Returning now to our discussion of successful partnerships let us take a look at the issue of partnership protocols.

Partnership Protocol

It is extremely important that, in order to avoid misunderstanding and difficulties in the future, a protocol be entered in by the partners. This guarantees a mechanism that will enhance accountability, clarify roles and responsibilities, as well as provide a means to solve problems and conflicts that may emerge during the life of the partnership. Protocols typically include:

- The duration or length of the partnership is clearly stated.
- The purpose of the partnership is identified.
- The objectives or goals of the partnership are noted.
- A program name or title is agreed upon. (For example, Operation Spotlight.)
- The specific conditions and procedures related to the partnership are listed with attention given to administration and operational guidelines, especially if there is any difference between how the partnership functions and the host agencies. This section will also deal with management/supervision of staff (chain of command issues) and

make explicit how the partnership will operate, file reports, enforce conditions, and share equipment and information.

- The training of staff who will be working in the partnership should also be set out in the protocol, who will provide it and how often.
- The mechanism for handling the violation process, and hearings, including arrests, etc., should be seen as a shared responsibility of the partnership. To avoid confusion have the process explicit in the protocol.
- The managing of relations with the media is an important consideration, especially when the partnership is targeting high-risk offenders. Who speaks for the partnership and the involved agencies should be planned and not incident driven.

If thoughtful planning and careful crafting of a protocol is done the agencies involved will find the partnership easier to implement.

I would now like to review for you what I believe have been some of the lessons learned from the implementation of probation/police partnerships in North America.

Lessons Learned

From a review of literature and narratives about probation/police partnerships, I have discerned six possible lessons that can be learned from these efforts and if we can correct for them or better plan to address them probation could improve its delivery of community safety initiatives. The lessons, in no particular order of importance are:

- Given the communities that probation/police partnerships tend to operate (lower socio-economic areas, areas of high crime rates and noticeable disorder) it will be important for probation to learn how to deal with power differences both within and between the communities served. This is essential if probation expects to adequately and appropriately engage the community it wishes to serve.
- In efforts by the partnership to engage the community effectively in assisting the supervision efforts, it will need to examine the appropriate conditions for genuine responsibility to be exercised.
- Probation needs a better understanding of the role of various levels of government, especially as they impact the local community.

- In efforts of the partnership to develop consensus, its members must keep themselves open and subject to challenge and to the possibility of change.
- The partnerships need to develop the necessary structures and processes that enable full participation of the partners and the community in which the partnership operates.
- The issue of accountability is an important and essential aspect of the partnership and appropriate forms need to be addressed.

Finally, I believe the major lesson to be learned is the need for a constant search for new ways of thinking and doing probation. The theme of this conference indicates that you have joined with the rest of the probation community in such a search.

By way of summary and conclusion let me close by briefly discussing four observations about probation/police partnerships.

Conclusion

In terms of effectiveness and efficiency in the supervision of high-risk offenders, particularly offenders prone to violence or to sexual offending, the partnering of probation and police is a key element in the provision of public security services.

It is clear, I believe, that probation and police organizations working together create a compelling picture of the possibilities for enhanced security services.

The work that probation/police agencies are doing that I know about could not be accomplished without developing close working relationships based on sharing of information and mutual trust and respect for each others abilities.

Finally, I would note that partnering is only worthwhile if it achieves outcomes that add real productivity and value to each organization and to the communities they serve.

Again, thank you for allowing me the privilege to share and report on my observations about partnering as it relates to the critical work of probation and police in ensuring community safety. My wish is that you

will continue your efforts to develop a model probation system within your specific context. Thank you for your kind attention.

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Mr. Evans is currently an adjunct professor at Woodsworth College, University of Toronto, in Penology and Policing. In the Past he has taught courses at Ryerson University, York University, and the School of Social Work, University of Toronto.

He is a Past President of the Probation Officers Association of Ontario, the American Probation and Parole Association, and the International Community Corrections Association. He is a member as well of the American Correctional Association and has served on the organization's Board of Governors; in addition, he is a member of the International Association of Re-entry, the International Corrections and Prison Association, the Canadian Criminal Justice Association, and an individual member of the Conference Permanent of the European Probation (CEP).

Currently Mr. Evans is editor of the *International Journal of Community Corrections*, writes a regular column on probation for *Corrections Today*, and is a regular contributor to *Executive Exchange*.
