

# Juvenile Justice Practitioners Add Value to Communities

By Cheryl K. "Cherle" Townsend

Community corrections agencies are often considered to include only adult probation and parole departments and community-based residential programs, such as halfway houses, for adult offenders. Often, community corrections professionals minimize the impact that juvenile probation and parole practitioners can make in prevention, accountability and outcomes in community corrections. Because juvenile probation and parole departments do not supervise as many offenders as their adult counterparts, the impact they have on the community is overlooked. The success of jurisdictions supervising juvenile offenders directly impacts correctional agencies serving adult offenders. Within community corrections agencies serving juveniles, the re-engineering of current practices that has taken place may be helpful to community corrections agencies serving both juvenile and adult offenders. Some of the successes jurisdictions have had with juvenile offenders will be highlighted here, as well as how the most promising practices of these agencies are consistent with the strategies promoted by the Reinventing Probation Council.<sup>1</sup>

## The Past Decade In Juvenile Probation

In 1997, a challenge was issued to community corrections leaders to be at the political and intellectual core of future policy-oriented efforts to promote public safety and offender rehabilitation. The alternative to responding to this challenge was to continue to be widely devalued, ineffective and woefully underfunded to do the job of community corrections. The Reinventing Probation Council was

established out of a sense that the timing was right to answer the challenge and for probation practitioners to embrace and share accountability for taking on the daunting task of re-engineering current practices.<sup>2</sup>

This was the same challenge that faced the juvenile justice system in the early 1990s. These practitioners were called upon to respond to horrific acts being committed by juvenile offenders and explain why the juvenile justice system was not preventing their crimes and holding them accountable after the commission of these crimes. As noted by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, "Traditional approaches to delinquency suffered an almost unbroken string of 'no confidence' votes in statehouses across the country during the 1990s, with lawmakers in nearly every state taking action to curtail juvenile court jurisdiction over serious and repeat offenders or to 'toughen up' juvenile court sanctioning to make it resemble that of the adult criminal justice system more closely. ... Much of this legislative activity was unmistakably motivated by the public's perception that the juvenile system has been too lenient in dealing with past crimes, and not effective enough in deterring future ones — indictments that are clearly directed not only at the courts, but at the juvenile probation departments that oversee the majority of their dispositions."<sup>3</sup>

These perceptions led to major statutory changes in many juvenile justice systems, as well as an examination of the basic philosophy and goals of community corrections agencies serving juvenile offenders. Many jurisdictions were surprised that they had become closed, passive, unresponsive to victims of crime and to communities, focused on the deficiencies of juvenile offenders and their families, and doing more of the same without positive

results. There are many juvenile justice practitioners who, after having gone through this often painful self-examination, now believe that they have had quite a lot of experience with re-engineering community corrections practices — at least when the focus is on juvenile offenders and their families, victims of their crimes and the communities in which they live (and offend).

What emerged from the above examination is consistent with the guiding principles used to update the *Desktop Guide to Good Juvenile Probation Practice* in 2000. The focus of community corrections agencies serving juvenile offenders shifted to action, collaboration and results-oriented. Many jurisdictions responded in ways that are consistent with the *Desktop Guide* vision statement, which reads, “We envision the role of juvenile probation as that of a catalyst for developing safe communities and healthy youth and families. We believe we can fulfill this role by:

- Holding offenders accountable;
- Building and maintaining community-based partnerships;
- Implementing results-based and outcome-driven services and practices;
- Advocating for and addressing the needs of victims, offenders, families and communities;
- Obtaining and sustaining sufficient resources; and
- Promoting growth and development of all juvenile probation professionals.”<sup>74</sup>

This vision statement is consistent with the strategies that were adopted as the broken windows model for community corrections, as well as with the vision statement of the American Probation and Parole Association. The strategies and examples of promising juvenile probation and parole practices that are included in *Transforming Probation Through Leadership: The “Broken Windows” Model*, clearly identify that community corrections agencies that serve juveniles are responsive to their communities, create public value, balance the interests of the victim, community and offender, and implement promising, proven, results-driven practices. They have turned the crisis they faced in the early and mid-1990s into an opportunity that promotes both public safety and juvenile offender rehabilitation/behavior change.

## Juvenile Justice System Models

While many community corrections agencies serving juveniles would say that the models they use are based on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s comprehensive strategy, balanced and restorative justice, or community justice models, the four strategies they have all used that seem to have had the greatest impact are:

- Placing public safety first;
- Providing for strong enforcement of probation conditions and a quick response to violations;
- Supervising probationers in the neighborhood, not the office; and
- Developing partners in the community (see Table 1).

The comprehensive strategy balanced prevention for at-risk youths and graduated sanctions for delinquent youths. The details of the strategy do call for evaluation, however, it is not as explicit as the broken windows strategy for establishing performance-based initiatives. And it does not really address the strategy of cultivating strong leadership with probation. Restorative justice principles and practices are based on an underlying belief that the harm that has been caused by crime must be repaired. The active stakeholders in the system are victims, offenders and the community. The focus of community justice is repairing harm, reducing risk and building community. The work that has been done using the community justice model best demonstrates all the strategies promoted by the broken windows model. This is particularly true in two areas, which other models have not addressed, for example, establishing performance-based initiatives and strong leadership.

## Current Juvenile Probation And Parole Practices

The Community Outreach Project in the 23rd Judicial Circuit in Hillsboro, Mo., is a good example of juvenile probation placing public safety first. In this project, deputy juvenile probation officers work with members of the Festus Police Department to conduct evening community patrols. The evening patrols include unannounced visits to the homes of the target population (juveniles who have exhibited assaultive/violent behavior) to ensure their compliance with the conditions of probation, increasing the degree of accountability placed on the juvenile and his or her parents. Other areas within the community that receive the attention of the patrol are sites within the community where juveniles are known to frequent. The visibility of probation and public safety is enhanced through this project. Evaluation of the project is centered on the recidivism rate of the target population.

In Baltimore, a similar program is called Hotspots. This initiative focuses on public safety, but it also incorporates the strategies of enforcing conditions, working in the community and developing partners in the community. In essence, juvenile probation works with police, adult parole and probation, federal probation and community groups to supervise probationers in the neighborhood and gain the assistance of the community in oversight of behavior/compliance and service delivery. Hotspots and its partnerships have resulted in the development of Community Conferencing and Youth Courts.

In Maricopa County, Ariz., juvenile probation has placed public safety first — not only through probation supervision, but also through an investment in juvenile crime prevention. Its work was recognized by the American Probation and Parole Association in August 2002 when it was the recipient of the Excellence in Community Crime Prevention Award. Since 1997, this jurisdiction has targeted the 20 zip codes with the highest rate of referral to the juvenile court and sought funding for community crime prevention efforts in these areas. Sixteen collaborative community-based initiatives have been funded in the targeted areas to prevent crime. The Maricopa County Office of Management and Budget conducted an analysis after the first year of the

**Table 1**

Programs and Services Provided (Number of Referrals)	Place Public Place	Programs Provided in the Community	Community Admission Percentage	Program Enrollment in the Community Programs or Services	Community Programs or Services	Programs Provided in the Community	Community Programs or Services
Community Programs or Services		---	---		---		
Community Programs or Services			---		---		
Community Programs or Services	---		---		---		
Community Programs or Services	---	---		---			
Community Programs or Services	---	---		---			
Community Programs or Services	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Community Programs or Services	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

initiative and reported that the project impact was calculated as a potential cost savings of \$6 million. More recently, a 33 percent reduction in referrals for violent offenses and an 11 percent reduction in nonviolent offense referrals have been documented in the targeted areas. This occurred at the same time the county experienced a 26 percent increase in its youth population.

### Enforcement Conditions

The Utah Juvenile Court both statutorily and philosophically subscribes to the balanced and restorative justice model for probation supervision. This is demonstrated by the work crews operated in the eight judicial districts. These crews allow for the strong enforcement of two conditions of probation that are not emphasized often enough: victim restitution and community work service.

In Utah, juvenile probation officers have authority to close cases nonjudicially. Forty percent of the cases referred to juvenile court are handled in this way. Financial penalties as a result of these closures are put in a dedicated account and these funds can be used to pay victim restitution. Each judicial district has organized work crews to complete juvenile compensatory service. An hour of service is converted into money (\$4 per hour in 1999) that is then used to pay restitution. One Utah work crew maintains Antelope Island State Park. It is responsible for feeding the buffalo herd that roams the park and maintaining the park grounds. In 1999, 92 percent of the restitution ordered (\$1,380,620) was collected. That means that \$1,274,991 in victim restitution was paid. At the same time, 95 percent of the community work service hours that were ordered were completed (677,855 hours). There is a similar program in St. Louis called the PayBack Program.

The Juvenile Justice and Child Protection Department of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Ill., enhances compliance

with conditions by operating evening reporting centers. These centers are located in community agencies that have been targeted to supervise and provide structured social and recreational programming during the critical hours of 3 to 8 p.m. The program has documented a success rate — as measured by remaining arrest-free during the time of the program — of 95.1 percent.

### Supervising Probationers in the Neighborhood

Typically, community corrections agencies serving juvenile offenders have supervised probationers in the neighborhood rather than from the office and, more recently, many agencies have used technology to support those efforts. The Juvenile Probation Department in Maricopa County developed a plan to not only increase the productive time of individual officers within the community, but also rationally allocate the department's resources through the concept of a Virtual Office Probation Officer (VOPO). These officers spend only one day each week in a traditional office. Their primary office is in the community. Their virtual office is in a briefcase on wheels that carries their laptop computer, cell phone and other support equipment. VOPOs have worked with the department's management information system staff to transform the Juvenile On-Line Tracking System into a field-book application. They download caseload information from the court's mainframe computer and then transmit their activities and contacts daily by dialing in to the computer system. The results of drug tests, restitution payments, compliance with other conditions of probation, safety alerts and scheduled court hearings are kept up-to-date and are transmitted to the field book for use by the juvenile probation officer and/or the court.

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The juvenile probation staff involved in this project work as teams to establish collegial groups within the community. The VOPO project has increased meaningful interaction between juvenile offenders and their families, allowed juvenile probation officers to develop relationships with businesses, schools, law enforcement and community organizations within specific neighborhood areas, and enhanced the quality of information provided to the juvenile court. It has also reduced the resources devoted to an increasing number of offices, office furniture and mileage to and from a central office to the field because more than 100 officers work as VOPOs. Juvenile probation officers report a high degree of satisfaction with the flexibility allowed as a VOPO in working hours and how work is conducted.

## Developing Partners in the Community

The juvenile division of Ohio's Court of Common Pleas in Lucas County was the first site in the state to establish a community cluster group. The purpose of this group is to address issues affecting youths who are involved in multiple systems. The Lucas County Cluster is a multidisciplinary team staffed by various agencies throughout the county. They work together to develop treatment plans and oversee the case management of those plans. This jurisdiction has also developed a police/probation team. This collaborative effort involves not only the court and the Toledo Police Department, but also a community mental health agency in Lucas County. The result is assessment and services at the community level.

The Oakland County Youth Assistance Program in Michigan was recognized in 1999 as the American Correctional Association's Program of the Year. It is a stellar example of court/community collaboration, which has been in existence for half a century. Primary and secondary prevention services are provided to juveniles and families through the Youth Assistance Program. The types of services provided include casework services, family education, mentors, skill-building, recreation, youth recognition and youth involvement. This program also conducts evaluations by measuring community trends and perceptions, volunteer mobilization and program effectiveness.

## Summary

While the transformation experienced in the juvenile justice system has often focused on making the system more like the adult system, juvenile justice practitioners continue to believe that some things are unique about their

practice and that they must incorporate the strategies promoted by the broken windows model. The successful practices highlighted above demonstrate that juvenile justice practitioners must focus on families, schools, informal networks and adolescent development in addition to the strategies themselves.

Whether they are called community corrections professionals or juvenile justice practitioners, these individuals are, to use the words of Lord Norman Warner, former chairman of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, "traveling hopefully." Community corrections professionals are not perfect, but they have many examples of exceptional practice, results and continual improvement. They are moving their agencies toward the creation of public value. And, in fact, many juvenile justice practitioners are embracing the key strategies for a rational probation system. Those involved in the revision of the *Desktop Guide* referred to juvenile probation as a catalyst. They said, "It makes things happen. It does not act by itself, but stimulates others to act." This does not relieve community corrections professionals of responsibility but gives them many partners in building and continually improving a system that is considered legitimate in mission and in results.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Reinventing Probation Council was initially facilitated by John H. Dilulio Jr., former director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. The work of the council was funded under the auspices of the Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute in New York, Public/Private Ventures in Philadelphia and the Fox Center at the University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> Reinventing Probation Council. 2000. *Transforming probation through leadership: The "broken windows" model*. New York: Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute with the National Association of Probation Executives, American Probation and Parole Association, and Robert A. Fox Leadership Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Juvenile Justice. 2000. *FOCUS*. Pittsburgh. (November).

<sup>4</sup> National Center for Juvenile Justice. 2002. *Desktop guide to good\* juvenile probation practice*, eds. P. Griffin and P. Torbet. Pittsburgh.

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