

Adult Probation in the United States

Foreword

While probation practice can vary significantly from state to state and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction within the same state, there are common tenets that underscore promising probation practices that are applicable in any locality, whether in adult or juvenile probation. Thus the white papers on adult and juvenile probation in the United States reflect many commonalities and have many similarities. This paper presents an overview of adult probation as it is practiced throughout the United States and highlights promising practices, that is practices that research and experience tell us are most likely to be successful.

The paper is organized in three parts with the first section presenting an overview of adult probation services across the country. The author has culled numerous resources to compile a thorough statistical analysis, and the information is as reliable as it can be unless new research were conducted for this project. It is recognized that using data compiled by others presumes a reliance upon the credibility of both the entity that conducted and analyzed the data and the entity that provided it, as well as how recently the data was collected, and the author recognizes that limitation in this paper. Statistical information, at best, provides only a partial picture and may indicate a state is providing a given service when it is available only in certain localities within the state. This section also describes some problems that are encountered in implementing probation services.

The second section features current thinking about what constitutes promising probation practices. Theories about what probation should accomplish and what it should look like have evolved over time, and the author presents a view of the current ideological and philosophical underpinnings that guide probation practice toward achieving the goal of effective and publicly relevant outcomes.

The third section describes promising probation practices and presents examples of

agencies around the country that are trying to put these practices in effect. The program examples are not presented as models with intact programs to be duplicated but as agencies that are striving to improve practices and thus can be looked to as leaders charting a path toward a desirable destination. There are numerous other probation agencies that merit this description, and the agencies presented are but a small sample of the creative, innovative work being done to enhance probation practice nationally.

Despite the wealth of information presented, this paper should not be viewed as an exhaustive treatise on probation practice. Numerous sub-topics within the paper warrant a description that would rival this paper in length if given complete and comprehensive treatment. However, this paper accomplishes the goal of providing an extensive overview of probation and promising practices with abundant references and resources for the reader to secure further information.