

Declaration of the workshop „Probation meets Prevention“.

by

CEP - THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION FOR PROBATION

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CEP - The European Organisation for Probation

Declaration of the workshop „Probation meets Prevention“

“CEP and its members are enthusiastic about being able to participate at this congress on prevention. The reason is that probation promotes crime prevention as part of its core work. The main emphasis of probation however is on tertiary prevention. Next to the traditional distinction between primary, secondary and tertiary prevention we have also looked into the distinction between situation orientated, victim orientated and offender orientated prevention. The distinction which is quite often used in child protection work seems also to have a strong appeal to probation work. In this child protection framework we distinguish between general interventions, interventions on defined target groups indicated high risk prevention and clinical prevention. We feel very much at home in clinical prevention or offender orientated prevention. Probation may have a part to play in the other prevention fields like in primary and secondary crime prevention but mostly this is a by-product, be it an important one. For example, successful work with domestic violence perpetrators may also have a beneficiary effect on younger family members, especially as we all know that violence in the family and domestic violence tend to lead into inter-generational crime and domestic violence. Of course the probation officers will not work with the children or with the family as a whole, but probation has a role to play in warning the child protection system, and the police, and to play its role in the containment of the unwanted behaviour of the offender. The supervision might offer a wonderful stick behind the door to use when the offender is not living up to his obligations under the supervision contract.

The ultimate goal of probation is the prevention of re-offending but total elimination of risk when offenders are being managed in the community is not possible. We have to be clear about that. Although the supervision might be intense, the probation is not 24 hours a day behind the back of the offender.

Success may be defined as the total prevention of re-offending, but in a lot of cases this is unrealistic in the short term. Success may also be defined as a reduction in the frequency of re-offending and a reduction in the harm caused. A longer period between crimes and less serious crimes also denote success.

It is good to stress that crime reduction is not only a probation job. It is every one's responsibility –communities as well as the other statutory agencies working in criminal justice.

What is the special role probation officers have to play in crime prevention? Their contribution is their skill in assessing and managing the risk offenders pose. But communities must acknowledge that there is a risk in having offenders in their midst.

Much of probation work is focused on evidence-based practice – the What Works system of interventions. But this is only successful within a system of good quality supervision, carried out by professional workers. They know how to motivate offenders to change. This is a key factor in probation work. It is also important that probation intervenes at an early stage in the criminal justice process. Not only can the motivation work start, but the probation can also advise the public prosecutor on the best possible way of bringing about change, giving due attention to the risk the offender poses and the unrest or indignation that his crime may have caused.

Probation's relationship with the community is vital. The service needs community acceptance to carry out its work. Partnerships are key to this work; probation officers must have close contact with the social networks in the community. They can offer new circles to the offenders in which they might experience new meaningful ties and opportunities for work, accommodation and social welfare benefits. In this way probation likes to think of itself as a land of opportunity to offenders. Mentoring projects and lay supervisors also play an important part.

There is a constant need for scientific research into what constitutes good probation work and resources should not be wasted on programmes which have been proved not to work.

We must not oversell what we can achieve but equally we must not undersell ourselves. It is important that we communicate our results to the public, to partners, to other agencies and to each other.

Working in the justice system and working with the community are essential and interlinked. CEP and its members are great protagonists of prevention, and we are and feel part of the prevention approach. CEP and its members would like to be active in the whole spectrum of prevention. At the same time we would not like to thin out or to distribute all our energy on this whole spectrum. Our strength is tertiary prevention in working with the offender, the justice system and the community. As probation people we have to become even stronger in this field to be effective and more successful in reintegrating the offender into the society and finally in reducing recidivism.”

Content

Introduction	1
Lectures from the 2nd Annual International Forum	
DIRK BAIER / CHRISTIAN PFEIFFER	
Turkish Children and Teenagers as Perpetrators and Victims of Violence	5
VALERIE SAGANT	
The International Centre for the Prevention of Crime and the International Report on Crime Prevention and Community Safety	33
C.-BERTA KIMMICH	
Intercultural youth Exchanges: opportunities for young people to prevent and de-learn violence and experience rays of hope	43
ROLAND ZISS	
Community participation in violence prevention – some examples from Latin America and South Africa.....	51
Contributions from participants of the 2nd Annual International Forum	
GABRIELA DE FREITAS BARBOSA	
Social Capital and Community Participation: Experiences of crime prevention in informal settlements of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.	73
RUTH LINSSEN / ERICH MARKS	
School shootings - Considerations on prevention in a context of relative ignorance of the phenomenon.....	89
ANGELOS GIANNAKOPOULOS / ANGELA KELLER-HERZOG / DIRK TÄNZLER	
ALACs (Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres). An Innovative Instrument of Transparency International for the Promotion of Participation and Citizenship in Europe and the Significance of the Co-operation between Non-Governmental Organisations and Social Science.....	99
SEBASTIAN SPERBER	
Citizen participation – a cornerstone for urban safety and the prevention of criminality	117
CORINNA HAUSWEDELL / SABINE KURTENBACH	
In war as in peace: youth violence – a challenge for international co-operation.....	127

Other content of the congress

JÜRGEN MUTZ

Welcome Speech for the Workshop „Probation meets Prevention“ within the
German Congress on Crime Prevention..... 137

CEP - THE EUROPEAN ORGANISATION FOR PROBATION

Declaration of the workshop „Probation meets Prevention“ 139

WIEBKE STEFFEN

The Leipzig Statement of the 13th German Congress on Crime Prevention
Committed citizens – a safe society 141

ERICH MARKS / KARLA SCHMITZ

An overview of the 13th German Congress on Crime Prevention 2008..... 145

Programme of the 2nd Annual International Forum

Authors