

Training Juvenile Probation Officers: National Trends and Patterns

Frances P. Reddington, Ph.D., Central Missouri State University

Betsy Wright Kreisel, Ph.D., Central Missouri State University

BY THE EARLY 1990s, the juvenile justice system was facing yet another crisis in its 100 years of existence—juvenile violent crime rates had increased. From the late 1980s through the mid 1990s, juvenile arrests for violent crime as well as weapons and drug violations experienced large increases (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999). Primarily because of the concern with the violent crime rate increases, the juvenile justice system responded with a plethora of reforms designed to exact harsher punishment (Torbet et al., 1996). Despite the resurgence of the get tough movement with juvenile offenders, juvenile probation remained and still remains the most widely used option in the juvenile justice system (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999). However, recent research suggests that the caseload that juvenile probation officers supervise may be changing.

According to Torbet (1996, p. 4), juvenile “probation is the ‘catch basin’ of the juvenile justice system and is being confronted with increasing and . . . more dangerous caseloads.” Between 1987 and 1996, the number of juveniles being placed on probation by the juvenile courts increased 58 percent (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999). In 1985, 15 percent of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent and placed on probation committed a crime against a person. By 1994 that percentage had climbed to 22 percent (Sickmund, 1997). In 1996 the percentage dropped only one percent to 21 percent (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999).

The challenges that juvenile probation officers face today are becoming increasingly difficult. According to Torbet (1996, p. 4) “the mission of probation will need to evolve even

further to respond to not only the juvenile offenders but also to the community.” These concerns raise the research question: Are we preparing our juvenile probation officers to face the challenges of their current caseloads and the challenges that the communities have issued to juvenile justice personnel? Is the training that juvenile probation officers receive effective and efficient given the challenges of the job? One way to answer this question is to determine nationwide trends and patterns in juvenile probation officer training. To date there has been little to no information collected about current juvenile probation officer training practices. Therefore, that is the focus of this research.

Methodology

In the fall of 1999, a telephone survey was conducted of all 50 states and the District of Columbia to gather information regarding training requirements for juvenile probation officers. In each state, a training contact person was identified. Each state received a survey, either by fax or mail, requesting follow-up information. States were surveyed regarding: what juvenile probation officers are called in that state; if that position is certified by the state; if there is mandatory training for that position, and if so, who mandates and who monitors the training process; what mandatory training consists of with regards to pre-service, basic fundamental and ongoing training; and what recommended training consists of with regards to pre-service, basic fundamental, and ongoing training.

For purposes of this research, pre-service training was defined as training offered or

required after hiring, but before job duties could be assumed. Basic fundamental job requirements were defined as training offered or required within a certain period of time once job duties were assumed, and continuing ongoing training was defined as training offered or required on a continuing interval. The distinction between “mandated” and “recommended” training was reflected in the survey instrument.

There were follow-up mailings, phone calls, and faxes in an attempt to gather information from as many states as possible. Information was received from 43 states and the District of Columbia for a return rate of 86 percent.

Literature Review

Despite the changing juvenile probation caseloads and challenges, training of juvenile probation officers is not a new topic. Professionalism in the juvenile justice field has been an ongoing issue for some time. With regards to juvenile probation officers, several recognized correctional agencies and national institutions have made recommendations concerning ideal training standards. Discussed below will be standards recommended by the American Corrections Association, the American Bar Association, and those recommended in the *Desktop Guide to Good Juvenile Probation Practice*.

The American Corrections Association recommends 40 hours of general orientation before juvenile probation officers are given their job assignments. This training should consist of policy and procedure, organizational structure, the agency’s rules and regu-

lations, and where relevant, those of the supervising agency as well. Moreover, the ACA recommends that every full-time professional juvenile probation officer be given 40 hours of training annually. The ongoing training should be designed to keep employees familiar with the changing juvenile justice field and to deepen their knowledge of the fundamental skills required to do their job successfully. This “retraining provides employees an opportunity to exchange experiences, define problems from their perspective, and communicate to the administration issues of special concern” (American Corrections Association, 1983, p. 13).

The American Bar Association recommends that “all personnel with direct supervisory responsibility for juveniles” have 80 hours of pre-service training with an additional 48 hours within the first six months of employment. The pre-service training should be designed to comprehensively provide an orientation to the job requirements. Included should be training in departmental policy, including the code of conduct, cultural diversity, special needs, constitutional rights, community services for juvenile offenders, supervising offenders including security problems, and other problems that juvenile probation department personnel encounter. Besides the initial training, the ABA recommends 80 hours of ongoing annual training. The areas of concentration should include updating departmental policies, job challenges, and updating tasks and programs (Shepherd, 1996, p. 33-35).

The National Center for Juvenile Justice in the *Desktop Guide to Good Juvenile Probation Practice* cited the National Advisory Commission Standards for training, which recommends “40 hours of initial training and 80 hours of ongoing training annually.” The training should be in the areas that impact the juvenile probation officer’s ability to provide services (Torbet, 1993, p. 120).

Perusal of these different standards reveals that juvenile probation officer training standards remains an area where there is little agreement regarding recommended hours, levels, and types of training. Our research will disclose the national trends and patterns of juvenile probation officer training.

Major Research Findings

Job Title

Responding to the question of what title was given those supervising juvenile offenders in

the community, 68 percent of the respondents (30 states) stated they use the title **probation officer** or **juvenile probation officer**. Other states used titles such as juvenile justice specialists, juvenile community corrections officers, juvenile or youth service counselors, corrections agents, juvenile service officers, or juvenile justice case managers.

Certified Position

When asked if the position was state certified, 45 percent of the respondents (20 states) stated that their states certify the juvenile probation officer position. Forty-eight percent of the respondents (21 states) do not certify (Refer to Table 1). Three states responded that certification procedures were under development. When asked to identify the certifying agency, the respondents’ answers ranged from the Department of Probation and Parole to individual circuits/counties.

Mandated Training

Eighty-two percent of the responding states (36 states) mandate juvenile probation officer training (See Table 2). Seven states do not mandate training. All the states that certify the position require some form of training. We next compared training hours of those states that certify against those states that do not. Those that certify require an average of approximately 101 hours of training compared to the average of 97 training hours for the states that do not certify.

Mandating Agency

Responses varied greatly as to who mandates training. The most common response, given by nine states, was the Department of Corrections (either adult or juvenile). Other responses included administrative order, statute, court mandate, and agency policy. Five states answered that no agency mandates the training.

Training Monitor

Thirty-one of the 36 states (86 percent) monitor mandated training. Agencies that monitor the training include the Department of Youth Services or Juvenile Justice Department (8 states), Administrative Office of the Courts (8 states), Department of Corrections (4 states), State Probation Services (4 states), Professional Development Bureau (4 states), Juvenile Court Judges Commission (1 state), State Supreme Court (1 state), POST Council (1 state), and individual circuits/counties (2 states). Three replying states did not know

TABLE 1
States’ Position on Certifying Juvenile Probation Officers

	State Certifies	No State Certification
Alabama	•	
Alaska		•
Arizona	•	
Arkansas	•	
California		•
Colorado	•	
Connecticut*		•
District of Columbia	•	
Florida	•	
Georgia		•
Idaho*		•
Illinois	•	
Iowa		•
Kansas		•
Louisiana		•
Maine		•
Maryland		•
Massachusetts	•	
Michigan	•	
Minnesota		•
Mississippi		•
Missouri		•
Montana	•	
Nebraska		•
Nevada	•	
New Hampshire	•	
New Jersey	•	
New Mexico	•	
New York		•
North Carolina*		•
North Dakota	•	
Pennsylvania		•
Rhode Island	•	
South Carolina		•
South Dakota	•	
Tennessee		•
Texas	•	
Utah	•	
Vermont		•
Virginia		•
Washington	•	
West Virginia		•
Wisconsin		•
Wyoming		•

*Under reorganization with possible certification being reviewed

**States not listed did not respond to questionnaire

TABLE 2
Responding States that Mandate Juvenile Probation Officer Training

Alabama
Alaska
Arizona
Arkansas
California
Colorado
District of Columbia
Florida
Georgia
Illinois
Iowa
Louisiana
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
Mississippi
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Virginia
Washington
Wisconsin

who monitors the training or did not have a training monitor.

Mandatory Pre-service (Training Prior to Assumption of Duties)

Fourteen states require pre-service mandatory training of their juvenile probation officers. The required hours for the training range from 16 to 120. The median training hours for pre-service mandatory training is 40 hours. This indicates that one-half of the states require 40 hours or more of mandatory pre-service training while the other half have 40 hours or less of mandatory pre-service training. The mode score for mandatory

pre-service training is also 40 hours. This indicates that 40 hours is the most common number of training hours for mandatory pre-service training (Refer to Table 3).

Mandatory Fundamental Orientation Training

Twenty-six states responded that they have mandatory fundamental orientation training (Refer to Table 3). The required hours for the training range from eight to 195. Generally most states require this training within the first year of employment.

Mandatory Continuing In-service Training

Thirty of the states require mandatory continuing training. The range of required training hours is from eight to 40 hours (Refer to Table 3). The median number of continuing in-service training hours is 30, which shows that half of the states fall on either side of the 30 hour range. The mode continuing in-service training hours is 40, indicating that 40 hours is the most common number of training hours among the states. Almost half of the respondents (50%) who mandate continuing training require 40 hours of continuing training every year.

Conclusions

According to Patricia Torbet (1996), there are approximately 18,000 juvenile probation officers in the United States. Most earn between \$20,000 and \$39,000 per year and receive basic benefits packages. Most have five to ten years of experience. Most chose the job "to help kids," and most cite their major job frustrations as dealing with the attitudes of the clients and their families, not being able to really impact the lives of the youth they supervise, and not being able to define and measure success (Torbet, 1996, p. 1). Furthermore, juvenile probation officers are facing increasing caseload sizes, changing types of offenders on their caseloads, public concern about the success of their jobs, and legislative reaction to that public concern.

Authors such as Ronald Corbett (1999) suggest that juvenile probation reform itself by following five specific steps: "let research drive policy, emphasize early intervention, emphasize the paying of just debts, make probation character building, and prioritize violence prevention" (p. 83-85). These reform steps would create a "doable agenda, not one that would likely entail additional large ex-

penditures but would rely on reallocating existing resources and redeploying current staff" (p. 85). It seems that there are lots of concerns and opinions voiced and research being conducted on the "oldest and most widely used vehicle through which a range of court-ordered services is rendered" (Torbet, 1996, p.1).

This research was designed to examine the training requirements and recommendations that exist for juvenile probation officers throughout the United States. How are we training juvenile probation officers for the challenging and changing jobs that they are facing?

The research yielded the major finding that nearly one-half (45%) of the responding states certify juvenile probation officers, as most of these professionals are called. Two additional states are contemplating state certification. Certification indicates a move toward a professionally credited position with job-specific training. This suggests that the juvenile probation officer position is one that is gaining considerable recognition as a very influential position in the criminal justice system. Just as police officers must be certified to perform their duties, so the trend is growing for certified juvenile probation officers.

Eighty-four percent of the respondents mandate training for their juvenile probation officers. Who mandates and oversees the training varies greatly by state. States are more likely to have fundamental orientation training as opposed to pre-service training, and more still require continuing in-service training which is most commonly 40 hours per year.

The research raised additional questions for research we are now engaging on. What topics are in the curriculums being used in juvenile probation officer training? Are there similarities, or perhaps more important, vast differences? Who funds the training program in each state? How often is training offered? Are there criteria for judging its effectiveness? In other words, does current training provide or enhance the tools that juvenile probation officers need to do the demanding jobs that they have chosen? Defining successful training for juvenile probation officers may be fraught with difficulty, but according to those who supervise juveniles, successful training should include acquiring better tools to "help kids" (Torbet, 1996, p. 1).

TABLE 3

Training Hours for Responding States

State	Mandatory Pre-Service	Mandatory Fundamental Orientation	Mandatory Continuing
Alabama	Applicants without experience 40 hrs supervised in-service	80 hrs classroom within 6 months of hiring	40 hrs / yr
Alaska	40 hrs orientation workbook	No	40hrs / yr
Arizona	No	70 hrs of academy within first yr	16 hrs / yr
Arkansas	No	Week long course within 1st yr of employment (Approx. 40 hrs)	12 hrs / yr
California	No	134 hrs within 1st yr of employment	24 hrs / yr
Colorado	No	84 hrs within 6 months. Additional 16 hrs within 2 yrs	40 hrs / yr
Connecticut	No	No	No
District of Columbia	40 hrs	2 weeks direct supervision on Job Training (Approx. 80 hrs)	40 hrs / yr
Florida	No	120 total hrs within 1st yr of employment (Orientation within 1st 14 days, Core/basic training and Intervention services training within 1st 6 months)	40 hrs / yr
Georgia	40 hrs	120 hrs within 1st yr	24 hrs / yr
Idaho	No	No	No
Illinois	No	40 hr basic within 1 yr	20 hrs / yr
Iowa	No	4 weeks (approx. 100 hrs) training program within 1st yr	15 hrs / yr
Kansas	No	No	No
Louisiana	40 hrs	40 hrs of POST* within 1st yr	40 hrs / yr
Maine	No	No	No
Maryland	80 hrs	No	40 hrs / yr
Massachusetts	10 days of probation orientation & 5 days of management training (approx. 120 hrs)	No	No
Michigan	No	Approx. 83 hrs within 2 yrs	No
Minnesota	40 hrs preservice academy training and 40 hrs orientation	No	40 hrs / yr
Mississippi	No	8 hrs	No
Missouri	No	No	No
Montana	40 POST*	No	No
Nebraska	No	120 hrs within 6 to 12 months	24 hrs / yr
Nevada	7 week POST*	No	40 hrs / yr
New Hampshire	78 hrs preservice and shadowing	144 training core to be completed within 1st yr of employment	30 hrs / yr
New Jersey	No	Approx. 84 hrs within 1st two months	12 hrs / yr
New Mexico	No	80 hrs	40 hrs / yr
New York	No	70 hrs of fundamentals of probation practice within first 6 mo./ 17 hrs of basic peace officer training within first 12 mo. and 47 hrs of firearms training within first 6 mo. (134 total training hrs)	21 hrs / yr
North Carolina	No	40 hrs orientation within first 4 months	8 hrs / yr
North Dakota	No	Basic 4 yr curriculum	No
Pennsylvania	No	No	40 hrs / yr
Rhode Island	2 weeks (Approx. 80 hrs)	No	20 hrs / yr
South Carolina	16 hrs orientation	62 hrs within first 3 months additional 56 hrs within 1st yr	40 hrs / yr
South Dakota	No	No	16–20 hrs / yr
Tennessee	120 hrs	No	40 hrs / yr
Texas	No Reply	40 hrs within 1st yr	80 hrs within 2 yrs
Utah	No	40 hrs	20 hrs / yr
Vermont	No	55 hrs within first 6 months, 75 additional hrs within 2 yrs	30 hrs / yr
Virginia	No	40 hrs within 60 days	40 hrs / yr
Washington	No	80 hrs within 1st 6 months	No
West Virginia	No	No	No
Wisconsin	No	195 hrs within first 18 months of employment	No
Wyoming	No	No	No

*POST – Peace Officers Standard Training **States not listed did not reply

References

- American Corrections Association (1983). Standards for juvenile probation and aftercare services. Commission on Accreditation for Corrections. Longmont, Colorado: National Institute of Corrections.
- Corbett, Ronald P. (1999). Juvenile probation on the eve of the next millennium. *Federal Probation*, 63 (2), 78-86.
- Sickmund, Melissa (1997). The juvenile delinquency probation caseload, 1985 -1994. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Shepherd, Robert E. (ed.) (1996). Juvenile justice standards annotated: A balanced approach. Washington D.C.: Institute of Judicial Administration, American Bar Association
- Snyder, Howard N., and Sickmund, Melissa (1999). Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 national report. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Torbet, Patricia (ed.) (1993). Desktop guide to good juvenile probation practice. Juvenile Probation Officer Initiative Working Group. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Torbet, Patricia (1996). Juvenile probation: The workhorse of the juvenile justice system. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Torbet, Patricia, et al. (1996). State responses to serious and violent juvenile crime. Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.