

JUDGES' UPDATE

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Information for the Judiciary



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YOUR INPUT

Welcome to the May issue of *Judges' Update* for 2001. If you have any comments or suggestions for this publication, please contact the General Manager Community Probation Service.

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Northland offenders begin SIP programme

Probation Officers in Kaikohe, Kaitaia and Whangarei are piloting the IOM Structured Individual Programme (SIP) with offenders.

Taitokerau Area Manager Lisa Pitman says feedback from Probation Officers has been positive.

SIP is a 30-hour programme that targets an offender's specific criminogenic needs, which has been developed for Integrated Offender Management. It is targeted at offenders who are eligible for criminogenic programmes but who have responsivity, geographic location or sentence length barriers to compliance. Barriers such as geographic location are particularly relevant for Taitokerau and the outlying rural areas it covers.

Whangarei Probation Officer Susan Whatmough is enthusiastic about SIP and says that the six offenders she is working with all seem to be responding to the programme. "They turn up for appointments

on time and are making small changes in line with what they're learning," she says.

Kaikohe Probation Officer Barry Considine delivered SIP to an offender on Home Detention and he is also optimistic about the programme. "Most of my caseload is high-risk offenders and I can do very high-quality work with people in their homes. They feel more relaxed and open up more than they might sitting in an office with me."

Kaitaia Probation Officer Kevin Pilbrow says SIP gives him tools he can use to work with offenders, which he says is particularly useful for relatively new Probation Officers like himself.

The SIP pilot runs until the end of this month, when it will be evaluated. The findings of this evaluation will inform planning for the national implementation of SIP. Eight Areas are expected to have implemented SIP before the end of the next financial year.

From the General Manager

I am pleased to return to Community Probation Service after a seven-month secondment as the Acting Chief Executive of the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Considerable work has been done in my absence to implement Integrated Offender Management, which is the Department of Corrections' top priority right now.

Integrated Offender Management will see a revolutionary change to the way Probation Officers and other Department of Corrections' staff approach their work.

Integrated Offender Management will make a difference to the service that the Community Probation Service provides to Judges, providing new assessment processes and new information in sentencing reports on serious offenders, new sentence management regimes and new interventions for offenders.

While the Integrated Offender Management implementation is well underway, the other major change for the Community Probation Service, the Government's sentencing law reform, is on the horizon. The current sentencing law proposals, announced earlier this year, are now at the drafting stage with Parliamentary counsel. We will keep you informed of any progress.

In this issue of Judges' Update, we report on how Probation Officers are finding the implementation of the Assessment component of Integrated Offender Management, as well as how Taitokerau staff are welcoming the 30-hour Structured Individual Programme they are piloting with offenders.

I look forward to working with you in the coming year.



Ann Clark
General Manager
Community Probation Service

Restorative justice pilot begins

A four-year restorative justice pilot will begin shortly in Auckland, Waitemata, Hamilton and Dunedin.

Judges can refer a case to restorative justice and Department for Courts staff will facilitate conferences between a victim, the offender and their support people. Conferences take place before sentencing and are subject to the willingness of all participants and the likelihood of a positive outcome. The offender must plead guilty for a case to be referred.

Burglary, theft, fraud, car conversion, driving offences and assaults are examples of offending that may be referred to the programme. Domestic violence cases are excluded.

The facilitator's report from the conference will provide the Judge with information for sentencing. The pilot will not change existing sentencing principles and sentences will remain within the current legislative range for the offence.

Referrals to conferences will begin around the end of June with the first conferences expected to be up and running by July.

Probation Officers have a small but essential role in the process. They will be kept informed of progress by the facilitator. They may contact the facilitator if they wish to attend the conference. Pre-sentence reports will be prepared in the usual way, but will include comment on the facilitator's report on the conference.

After evaluation of the pilot, recommendations will be made to the government on the most effective ways to incorporate restorative justice into the criminal justice system.

Employment skills help reduce re-offending

The recent prison census showed that only 15 percent of female and 41 percent of male inmates had jobs before being sentenced to prison.

Inmate employment is one of the Department of Corrections' key tools in reducing re-offending, says David Bremner, National Manager of Corrland Inmate Employment. More than 3500 inmates are involved in inmate employment throughout the country's prisons. This represents about 70 percent of the eligible inmate population.

Corrland Inmate Employment is an amalgamation of Corrland, which focused on land-based work, and Public Prisons Service's inmate employment programme. This new structure enables the group to focus more clearly on the goals of inmate employment and to integrate all inmate employment into one area within the Department.

Inmate employment aims to provide offenders with the opportunity to improve their work habits, work experience and skills in order to increase their chances of finding a steady job after being released.

Mr Bremner says the group's focus is to provide practical on-the-job training in workplaces that reflect the real world commercial environment. "This will help former inmates obtain work and reduce re-offending."

Examples of successful inmate employment initiatives include the piggery at Christchurch Prison and the printshop at Wellington Prison. "In addition, we also have a number of joineries at various prisons throughout the country," Mr Bremner says.

New reports debut in court

The new-style pre-sentence reports are now appearing in courts around the country, as Probation Officers complete training in the Assessment component of Integrated Offender Management.

Probation Officers are commenting on the high quality of the training and returning enthusiastic about putting their learning into practice.

“Our staff are coming out raring to go,” Hamilton Area Manager Heather Mackie says.

“Everyone who has been trained is now writing very good reports and our local Judges are pleased with the reports being produced.”

Probation Officers in the Hamilton, Rotorua, Bay of Plenty Coast, Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast and Christchurch Areas are continuing Assessment training until October. Staff in other Areas will begin training around that time, as IOM is progressively rolled out around the country.

Level 2 or remand reports are beginning to be produced for Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast Area courts, with a mix of old and new reports being written until all staff in the Area are trained.

Heather says it is encouraging to see the Probation Officers so enthusiastic about Assessment. “They’re seeing the quality of the tools that IOM provides and the quality of the work they can do. That is really its own reward as it enables them to increase their professionalism.”

Level 2 assessments are comprehensive assessments that explore the offender’s behaviour, thoughts, feelings and social conditions related to offending, as well as examining other needs that may have an effect on offending. These assessments focus on the key factors present just prior to and during the offending. The pre-sentence report also includes information on the offender’s social circumstances.

As well as informing judicial decisions, information gathered for Level 2 reports helps the Department of Corrections target interventions, such as programmes and education, to where they will be most effective.

Offenders learn literacy skills

Community Probation Service’s Rotorua Service Centre has completed a three-week pilot programme offering literacy education to periodic detainees.

Reading and especially writing, are more likely than not to be a problem for offenders.

Statistics from the 1999 prison census show that about three quarters of prison inmates had left school without any qualifications and about one half did not obtain any qualifications after leaving school.

The tutors for the Rotorua pilot were members of the community, including one former periodic detainee, who have been trained by Literacy Aotearoa, the Maori arm of the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance Society (ARLA).

Feedback from offenders was very positive, with the group keen to extend their learning in several areas, including numeracy and Te Reo Maori, says Service Manager Geoff Scrivener.

Some of the comments from the offenders who took part included:

“I understood clearly the speaking and writing that was taught to me.”

“I learned division and some punctuation which I’ve been wanting to know for many years.”

“The tutors had a very good attitude and were down-to-earth people.”

“I hope the course carries on.”

“Today I learned something I should have learned ages ago.”

“I learned a few things in Maori that I didn’t know.”

“Choice day.”

“Today I learned about fractions.”

Geoff hopes the literacy scheme will be extended so it can be offered to all offenders and possibly in other areas around the country.

First offenders 'graduate' from PILLARS

Two offenders have successfully passed through the PILLARS programme. PILLARS is the Christchurch-based reintegrative services pilot, which is running for two and a half years, funded by the Department of Corrections.

The pilot is also running in Auckland, where it is called Te Hokinga Mai. "It is a service for high-risk inmates who are going to undertake a parenting role on release from prison," says Jane Leeburn, Community Probation Service Operations Adviser.

Jane works closely with PILLARS and Te Hokinga Mai staff to ensure the smooth running of the pilot.

PILLARS Senior Social Worker Penny Richardson says the programme is an early intervention that offers intensive support for offenders, pre and post-release.

"There is a focus on re-integration, particularly relating to any family issues or other related areas," she says.

The aim is that this support will lead to better outcomes for the offender and a reduction in re-offending.

PILLARS has recently seen two clients successfully exit the programme. This means that the staff have developed a case plan with the offender, who has set and met his or her goals and no longer needs the services of PILLARS.

Penny describes the success of one of those offenders:

"He joined the programme in March 2000 and was released from prison two months later. This client had a long history of offending and we worked with him to address anger issues, particularly those related to his former partner. He found a job by himself and we supported him in his goal of showing his former partner he could work with her amicably in seeing his children. He exited the programme in March this year and he is still employed and is still seeing his kids."

District Prisons Board's unique style

North Shore Service Manager Mike Webster explains how the local Board operates under Integrated Offender Management.

The North Shore District Prisons Board has forged an almost unique operational style. It is one of the first District Prisons Boards to work with Public Prisons Service assessors, under Integrated Offender Management.

Chaired by District Court Judge Stan Thorburn, the Board's distinctive quality is found in its relationship with the assessors who write the reports on each inmate due to appear before the Board's monthly sitting. Terry Haines, Claude Dennis, Tina Tohill and Noeline Wackrow conduct behavioural interviews and identify criminogenic needs –

factors that lead to offending.

The assessors attend the Board's sitting at the request of the chairperson and are able to provide specific input to the decision-making process.

This relationship has created a mutual commitment between the Board, Auckland Prison staff and management, Community Probation Service and others involved in the work of the Board. I am in frequent contact not only with the assessors, but up until recently also with the IOM manager for Auckland and Mt Eden Prisons, Jim van Rensburg. This working

relationship – affected detrimentally only when the All Blacks are playing the Springboks – resolves issues that arise at an early stage, and facilitates ongoing co-operation.

Jim has recently taken up a new post, and Wendy Miller-Burgering has assumed responsibility for the assessors. We are already enjoying a good working relationship.



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