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On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice program evaluation. This report was written by staff Research Analyst Kimberly Burke. It is a summary of an implementation evaluation of domestic violence programs in Lake, Winnebago, and Kankakee counties. The evaluation was conducted by Justice Research Associates. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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Domestic violence probation in Lake, Winnebago, and Kankakee counties

The number of domestic violence incidents being addressed by the criminal justice system has increased in recent years, with more victims pressing charges and proceeding with their cases. The number of orders of protection issued rose 12 percent between 1996 and 2000, and the number of women served by shelters increased 12 percent from 1998 to 2000, according to the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence. In addition, the number of offenders on probation for domestic violence offenses more than doubled in Illinois between 1997 and 2000.

In June 1999, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority launched a plan to use federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds to establish and enhance domestic violence probation programs in Illinois, including programs in Lake, Winnebago, and Kankakee counties. This *On Good Authority* summarizes an assessment of these domestic violence probation programs.

Justice Research Associates conducted an implementation evaluation of the programs beginning in 1999. In a succession of site visits and interviews, investigators collected data to describe the general manner in which each county approached the issue of domestic violence, and how the project impacted the process of handling domestic violence cases.

The three jurisdictions maintained a philosophy of ensuring victim safety

throughout the process. They adopted a victim-centered approach, but had difficulties maintaining victim involvement. There was an emphasis on a coordinated community response to domestic violence that incorporated sanctions, supervision, and treatment for the offenders. In Lake County, the groundwork for the specialized domestic violence probation program included a domestic violence court and a pre-existing domestic violence probation program, which they enhanced by creating a surveillance unit. In Kankakee and Winnebago counties, the grants were used to provide specialized probation services in existing domestic violence courts.

Lake County

Domestic violence probation population

To provide a context for summarizing the implementation evaluation of the domestic violence probation program in Lake County, characteristics of the targeted population were studied. In a sample of 161 domestic violence cases assigned to probation between July and December 1999, 58 percent of victims reported being intimate partners of the probationer, and 22 percent were married to the probationer. More than 75 percent of probationers reported being employed at the time of the offense. Ninety percent of probationers received an order to complete domestic violence treatment. The majority

of probationers also were treated for substance abuse. About 65 percent of offenders in the program were convicted of domestic battery. Nearly one-half of all probationers had a prior misdemeanor conviction for domestic violence.

Program description

The Lake County Probation Department added a surveillance component to its existing domestic violence probation program. This element consisted of two surveillance officers who provided increased monitoring of probationers. Each officer was responsible for about 100 cases. Surveillance contacts were in addition to contacts probationers received from their regular probation officer. Surveillance officers worked nights, weekends, and holidays and conducted unannounced home, treatment center, or workplace visits to ensure offender compliance with probation conditions.

The principal duties of the surveillance officer included:

- Gathering information from police, the victim, and the offender to find out what the offender was doing.
- Deterring future domestic violence through close monitoring of the offender.
- Enforcing conditions of probation by holding the offender accountable for any violations.

Surveillance officers also contacted victims to assure them that their case was still being closely followed.

The implementation of this project had several positive outcomes for Lake County. Relationships between the local police departments and surveillance officers improved through routine monthly meetings, which also enhanced the flow of more detailed information between domestic violence probation officers and law enforcement personnel. Also, the availability of surveillance officers to make unannounced home visits deterred and/or detected behaviors related to the recurrence of domestic violence incidents. Lastly, there was increased contact with victims through home visits and collateral visits, which occurred when a no-contact order was

Table 1

Domestic violence probation characteristics

Offender characteristics		Lake County	Winnebago County	Kankakee County
Average probation term		18 months	18 months	17 months
Average age		32	33	33
Gender	Male	91%	90%	88%
	Female	9%	10%	12%

issued against the offender for the victim. Victim participation also increased.

Some concerns also were identified. The length of time it took to formulate a treatment and supervision plan between conviction and first surveillance contact, usually about one month, was problematic, as victims rely on the expedience of the system for safety. The surveillance officers' heavy caseloads also needed restructuring. Other concerns included the lack of a digital camera and color printer to obtain photographs of offenders, and the need for law enforcement domestic violence training, particularly in the area of identifying pertinent information to be collected and reported in domestic violence cases. Finally, probation officers indicated they needed more guidance on obtaining the data necessary to measure the continuing effects of the program.

Winnebago County

Domestic violence probation population

Probationer characteristic data was drawn from a sample of 205 domestic violence probation cases assigned between July 1999 and November 2000. Nearly 70 percent of victims reported being intimate partners of the probationer, and 24 percent were married to the probationer. About 60 percent of the probationers were employed at the time of the offense. Nearly 50 percent of the probationers had no prior formal relationship with the

criminal justice system at the time of arrest, and 36 percent were on probation when arrested for the offense that led them to the program.

Program description

The 17th Judicial Circuit Family Violence Coordinating Council guides the domestic violence programs in Winnebago County. Coordinating council members include a chief judge, three additional judges who hear family violence cases, the state's attorney, victim coordinators, the county sheriff, the clerk of the circuit court, and representatives from the jury commission and police, probation, and parole departments. This group, which focuses on all aspects of family violence, was instrumental in the creation of a courtroom to hear domestic violence cases exclusively.

Winnebago County took a three-pronged approach to domestic violence that included victim safety, offender accountability, and supervision of offenders. They aimed to enhance the probation department's contact with victims and increase offender accountability through more intensive supervision. This project brought to fruition several new efforts in domestic violence probation in Winnebago County, including:

- Development of a victim contact sheet, which was kept in the court file to track the probation officer's communication with the victim.

- Development of a probationer classification sheet to determine the levels of supervision needed.
- Monthly meetings for domestic violence courtroom personnel, including judges, probation officers, and assistant state’s attorneys assigned to domestic violence cases, the presiding judge, and a representative from the clerk’s office.
- Routine weekly contact between the probation department and service providers.

In Winnebago County, the emphasis in domestic violence cases was on interviews and assessments to determine the proper treatment and sanctions of probationers. The screening process became more efficient with courtroom personnel meetings, weekly contacts, and worksheets.

Evaluators noted several positive changes in the handling of domestic violence probation cases, including enhanced communication between probation officers, police officers, and court officials, as well as improved responses to domestic violence through more experienced officers who had the ability to handle larger caseloads. Systemic improvements included an increased volume of domestic violence cases coming through the criminal justice system, indicating that victims were becoming more willing to take legal action against their abusers. In addition, there was increased use of treatment providers, and better communication between the court and treatment providers.

Evaluators found system deficiencies in records management, including an inconsistent reporting system and a lack of assessment tools. The need for training of personnel involved in the domestic violence court process also was noted.

Kankakee County

Domestic violence probation population

Probationer data was based on a sample of 52 domestic violence probation cases initiated in December 2000. About 35 percent of the offenders lived with a spouse or intimate partner while in the domestic violence probation program.

Systemic improvements included an increased volume of domestic violence cases coming through the criminal justice system, indicating that victims were becoming more willing to take legal action against their abusers.

Sixty percent of the offenders needed drug or alcohol treatment. At the time of data collection, more than 75 percent of the domestic violence probationers in Kankakee County had violated their probation. Slightly more than 30 percent of the violations included arrest for a new offense.

Program description

Kankakee County created a Domestic Violence Court in 1996, based on the model used for the county’s drug court. When an individual is charged with domestic violence in Kankakee County, he or she is given the choice of either having the case heard in criminal court or settling in domestic violence court. If the individual chooses to settle, he or she must plead guilty to the charges and complete a diversionary program of drug and alcohol assessment and treatment and anger management classes. If the program is completed successfully, the charges are dropped.

The domestic violence probation program combines supervision and treatment for offenders who failed to meet the conditions of the diversionary domestic violence court program, or who were convicted of domestic violence offenses in criminal court. Offenders who were involved in a domestic incident but were ineligible for the domestic violence diversionary program because of their history of criminal offenses also are served by the domestic violence probation program. For example, if an offender violates an order of protection while on probation for another offense, the offender will be put into the domestic violence probation program and supervised by a domestic violence probation officer.

The goals of this specialized probation program are to increase victim safety, reduce recidivism, increase offender accountability, and effectively utilize community resources. In December 2000, 40 offenders were assigned to the domestic violence probation program in Kankakee County.

Kankakee County’s domestic violence probation program utilized a three-phase sequence in which probationers were assigned. The first phase incorporates the highest level of supervision and usually occurs in the first three months of probation. A probationer in Phase I must meet with his probation officer once every two weeks, and be present for at least one home visit each month.

Phase II typically begins in the third month and lasts until the ninth month. Phase II probationers must visit a probation officer once a month and be present for one home visit per month.

Phase III, the lowest level of supervision, usually begins in the ninth month and requires one office and one home visit every other month. Graduation from one phase to the next, as well as a return to a higher level of supervision, occurs at the discretion of the probation officer.

The specialized program requires certain conditions be met by the probationer, including:

- Meeting with the probation officer.
- Evaluation and treatment as needed for drug and alcohol dependency.
- Treatment for anger management.
- Full-time employment.

The domestic violence probation program in Kankakee County is more rigorous than standard probation. Domestic violence probationers must meet with their probation officer much more frequently than regular probationers. This gives domestic violence probation officers more opportunities to implement sanctions for non-compliance.

The Kankakee County Probation Department strived to reach program goals through a variety of initiatives, including increasing the number of offenders accepted into the program, and increasing offender compliance with

court-ordered mandates through intensive supervision and increased sanctions. The program also offered victims an opportunity to attend educational programs on court procedures, the importance of testifying, the cycle of violence, and the need for offender consequences.

Conclusion

The domestic violence probation projects in Lake, Winnebago, and Kankakee counties embodied practical interventions for domestic violence probationers. Each augmented an existing coordinated effort in dealing with domestic violence. Though there are significant structural differences between these three projects, they are similar in many ways. Each project stems from a domestic violence court and blends supervision, treatment, and sanctions for domestic violence offenders.

The projects also increased victim involvement and demonstrated a commit-

ment to victim safety. Victim involvement was the most difficult aspect to implement in all three projects. Many victims looked at probation as offender-oriented and not something that could be of assistance to them. In addition, often by the time the offender was placed on probation, the victim either already had reconciled with the offender or was not interested in being involved.

Evaluators found the appropriate population of offenders was being reached in each program, but that probation departments perceived a need for more state-certified treatment providers for domestic violence probationers. Evaluators also found the programs were well implemented and appeared to have the appropriate structure, involvement, and staff support to continue to reduce domestic violence in their communities. While there seems to be sufficient data existing at each site, evaluators recommended using more specific data collection instruments, and developing a

tracking system to determine outcomes in each county. Evaluators concluded that each program has made significant strides toward a comprehensive strategy to deal with domestic violence in these jurisdictions. ♦

