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## Monterey County volunteer agencies

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Senior Capstone Project  
Monterey County Volunteer Agencies

## **Executive Summary**

The U.S. Probation Office of San Jose is dedicated to contributing to the equitable and humane administration of justice in the community through excellence in the services they provide to the Federal Court System. They serve the court by preparing thorough, independent, timely and accurate reports. Probation officers develop just assessments and recommendations. Officers responsibly enforce conditions of supervision, and fulfill all other obligations. They also assist offenders under supervision by providing guidance to ensure compliance with conditions of probation. The probation office offers casework services and treatment opportunities for rehabilitation. They do this while focusing on community safety.

I started this project with the Monterey U.S. Probation Office. The problem they were facing was offender's inability to complete their assigned community service hours during the allotted time of their probation. Offenders stated they were unavailable to complete hours due to lack of resources. Offenders were unaware of which agencies were available in their area. Oftentimes, offenders residing in the South County area (King City, Soledad, Greenfield, Chualar) did not have available transportation. The U.S. Probation officers (USPO) also had situations when offenders would encourage friends in outside agencies to give them credit for all hours needed. Officers were often unaware. Officers want to build relationships with participating agencies to improve their monitoring. These are only a few of the problems the Monterey U.S. Probation Office faced. In December of 2003, the office was notified by their landlord that he would not be renewing their lease for the upcoming year. The office was closed in January of 2004 and all Monterey County cases were moved to the San Jose Probation Office. Another

problem arose, San Jose Probation Officers were unaware of any resources in Monterey County and were unfamiliar with the location. Currently, with the shortage of officers to handle the new Monterey County cases, offenders are not being helped to complete community service hours. Officers are not equipped with sufficient information on Monterey County resources.

The proposed project to assist with the U.S. Probation Office's problem was to create an electronic database containing Monterey County volunteer agencies. The database included the name of the agency, address, contact person, phone number, hours of availability, and any special instructions the agency requested prior to referring an offender. The database was created to be able to add, edit, or delete information. This gives officers the opportunity to search for further agencies in Monterey County, as well as other counties to enhance the database. This database of volunteer agencies will help officers to improve monitoring offender's community service hours, help officers in San Jose to become familiar with Monterey County, and build relationships between the U.S. Probation Office and participating agencies.

### **Problem**

The Northern California U.S. Probation office is composed of the Chief U.S. Probation Officer Debra K. Aasmundstad, Supervising Probation Officer Susan Portillo, ten U.S. Probation Officers, and office employees. In the agency orientation I was informed that I would be treated as an officer. Part of my orientation required traveling to the San Jose Office and meeting with Frank Ting from human services to be sworn in, as an actual officer would be. I would place myself after the U.S. Probation Officers and before the office employees in the organization.

The U.S. Probation office works with adult felony offenders. One of the many duties a U.S. Probation officer has is to help probationers meet all the conditions of probation. One of the conditions of probation that offenders must follow is completing community service hours during the term of their probation. On average offenders are given 100 to 400 hours of community service. Offenders will seek assistance from their probation officer to locate a volunteer agency, but San Jose Officers are not familiar with the area. In order for officers to help offenders meet their conditions of probation they need to be knowledgeable in all areas. Officers want to be able to have agencies available for offenders to complete hours. The availability of agencies to offenders will enable them to fulfill their condition of community service hours.

### **Background**

The absence of available community service agencies has become a problem because offenders are not completing their community service hours. Due to the lack of resources, offenders are uncertain of the complete process of finding an agency. Other offenders have transportation issues, and will have a harder time finding an agency in their community. Another issue officers are facing is the inability to properly monitoring offender's hours. There have been instances when offenders will encourage their friends to contact the officers and state that the hours have been completed with their agency. Occasionally, officers will not catch this act in the process and the offender will get away with not completing hours accordingly.

This problem began with the officer's inopportunity to seek agencies willing to work with offenders. This process is time consuming and officers have several other duties needed to aid offenders in meeting their conditions. Monterey County Cases were

handled in the Monterey U.S. Probation Office, but in January of 2004 the office was closed. After the Monterey office was closed the Monterey cases were moved to the San Jose office. Furthermore, San Jose officers are not familiar with the Monterey County area. Currently, the absence of agencies has been overlooked. Officers will attempt to keep in contact with the agencies already working with offenders and try to maintain a relationship to refer other offenders.

### **Literature Review: Rehabilitation**

The U.S. Probation Office commits itself to aid offenders in entering back into the community after the completion of their probation time. This is part of the rehabilitation process the offender must experience. The offender first undergoes the process of restorative justice, following the theoretical model of behavioral addiction is addressed, and the evaluation of the rehabilitation.

Restorative justice begins with a crime, deciding the best punishment, and the best treatment or program for rehabilitation. The question of punishment and treatment has been a great debate in criminal justice for the past four decades (Etzioni 1999). Restorative justice can be defined as a three dimensional collaborative process between crime victims, offenders and the community. For the victim, restorative justice offers the hope of restitution, information about the case, the opportunity to be heard, and input into the case. For the community, there is a promise reduced fear and safer neighborhoods, a more accessible justice process, and accountability. The justice response at the community level must also involve citizens and community groups in repairing damaged relationships or building new relationships. A few examples of restorative sanction practices are restitution to crime victims, victim-offender mediation, direct service to

victims, service to surrogate victim (offender work crews), and community service. The stakeholders participating are the victims, the community, and the offender. The professional roles involved are sanctions (facilitate mediation), rehabilitation, and public safety. This is the first step of rehabilitation, but the offender's behavior needs to be evaluated.

Forms of criminal offending are connected to certain addictions. Addictions are viewed as the product of faulty learning from a distorting and problem-generating environment. Addictive patterns of behaviors can be corrected by manipulating the environment and by educational systems. The behavioral theory draws attention to what sets off the addictive activity, and identifying patterns of reward and punishment that sustain or modify the behavior (Hodge 1997). This model enables for the best treatment to be given to offenders to effectively address the core of the problem. The rehabilitation process needs to be effective to help offenders enter the community as productive citizens and not re-offend.

The effectiveness of rehabilitation can rely heavily on treatment programs. Programs found to increase criminal recidivism can be divided into two categories. The first includes programs that result in an increase in recidivism due to increased monitoring. The closer an offender's behavior is watched, the more likely it is that a violation will be caught, which might otherwise have been missed with less intensive supervision. The second category of program failures includes those programs that increase criminal behavior. For example, some gang intervention programs have been found to increase actual rates of criminal offending, which were subsequently reduced when the program was terminated. Another danger of ineffective rehabilitative

programming relates to the false sense of security when an offender is released after treatment (May 2000). All of the mentioned factors need to be addressed in order to fulfill the overall goal of successful rehabilitation.

### **Project Description**

An electronic database was created for the San Jose U.S. Probation Office to address their problem. The database was titled, Monterey County Volunteer Agencies. The database included agencies in King City to Pacific Grove to address the transportation issues. The database includes the agency's name, address, contact person, phone number and any special restrictions the agency may have. The database enabled officers to add, edit, or delete agencies to upgrade the available agencies.

This database allows officers to refer offenders to the agency that best fits their needs and the agency's needs. This gives officers the capability to monitor the offender's hours. Also, this helps build relationships between the agencies and the U.S. Probation Office.

The database was completed in a series of steps. First an interview was conducted with U.S. Probation Officer Noel Belton to discover how the office was hoping to address their problem. Second, an agency questionnaire was compiled and approved by Supervising U.S. Probation Officer, Susan Portillo. The questionnaire included all the agency's information and restrictions the referred offenders needed to follow in order to participate. Third, I began calling different agencies throughout Monterey County. Several agencies agreed to allow our offenders to become volunteers, but several restrictions were given. The Boys and Girls Club had several steps before becoming a volunteer, such as orientations and interviews. Other agencies were reluctant

to allow federal offenders to participate. All in all, fifteen agencies agreed and their information was collected. The fourth step was compiling the data to begin creating the electronic database. The database was created using Microsoft Access. I was unfamiliar with the program and needed to learn step by step. After becoming familiar with the program the database was created. The database was created to be simple and user-friendly. The program was introduced to the San Jose U.S. Probation Officers in a presentation. Within the presentation, the officers were taken step by step through the program. They were taught how to add, edit, or delete information to keep the database updated. A paper format of the available agencies was created for office use, as well as a set of instructions on how to use the database if any questions were to arise.

The database was completed in March and was evaluated the end of April. The evaluation was based on a single-subject and was qualitative. In the start of the process a pre-interview was conducted to find out how the agency wanted to address the problem. The post interview was with Supervising U.S. Probation Officer, Susan Portillo. This interview discussed if the database was effective in addressing their problem and if any improvements needed to be made.

### **Application of Project to Academic Requirements**

This project will focus on four major learning outcomes, information management, personal and professional communication, collaboration, and knowledge of health and human services. Using an electronic database to compile all the volunteer agencies would complete the information management MLO and knowledge of health and human services MLO. The database would be compiled using the available software in the probation office for all the officers. The personal and professional communication

MLO will be addressed with the volunteer agencies, the federal probation office, and myself. In order to successfully complete the available volunteer agencies, clear communication needs to be established between the probation officers and the volunteer agencies. The agency information and final evaluation will be used as evidence for this major learning outcome. The evaluation will show if the agencies and probation officers had successful professional relationships. The collaboration MLO would be fulfilled with my relationship with the agencies in the community. The collaboration between the agencies and the officers is essential to keep the offenders on the right path in completing their required community service hours. The evaluation will measure if the collaboration MLO was met effectively.

Reviewing the university's vision statement, my project ties in with three passages, "distinctive in serving the diverse people of California, especially the working class," the population I am focusing on are the individuals that are in the criminal system trying to enter back into a community that does not wish to accept them. Oftentimes this population is forgotten and is not given enough assistance to be successful in completing their terms of probation. "The university will be a collaborative, intellectual communication, distinguished by partnerships..." with the volunteer database relationships will be established between the community and the probation office. These relationships are essential for the offenders to meet their requirements. Probation officers want the offenders to have a positive experience in their agency and not only seek to complete the required hours. "The university will invest in preparation for the future through integrated and experimental use of technologies as resources to people," using an electronic database will make all the agency information more accessible for probation

officers in various offices wishing to learn about the available resources in Monterey County.

I will be presenting my capstone project using a power point presentation. I will also present the actual database created and how it is used to place offenders according to specific restrictions. I will also display the agency questionnaires outline and the final evaluation interviews.

### **Conclusion**

The Monterey County Volunteer Agencies Database benefited the U.S. Probation Office in several ways. Following post-interview, Supervising Probation Officer, Susan Portillo expressed how the database was effective. She stated the database was user-friendly, accessible, and allowed officers to update information. She also added that a new officer was being hired to specifically handle the Monterey County cases. The database will help the new officer in becoming familiar with the area and serve as a great resource for offenders still attempting to complete their community service hours. The only improvement Susan gave was to expand the counties covered. The office hopes to incorporate Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties. Overall, the office was pleased with the results of the database and is planning to continue using the database.

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