

## Newsletter

July 2019

### Welcome

To the inaugural edition of the United States Probation Office for the Northern District of Illinois' Newsletter *Changing Times*



# Changing Times

## United States Probation Office for the Northern District of Illinois

This quarterly newsletter will highlight information from the field, including success stories, information on interventions utilized by probation officers, information about our resource partners, and other pertinent probation news. This inaugural issue focuses on three success stories of persons under supervision.

**Vision:** To strive for excellence and innovation in the administration of justice.



**Mission:** To create a safer community by providing the court and supervising authorities with pertinent facts, objective analysis and recommendations to assist in sentencing and supervising convicted offenders. We will assist offenders in establishing law abiding behavior by addressing their needs and balancing such needs with the risk they present to the community.

The United States Probation Office for the Northern District of Illinois spans eighteen counties and has offices in Chicago, Lisle, and Rockford. As of June 1, 2019, the probation office has 2,951 persons under supervision and has prepared 242 presentence reports in 2019.

# Making Changes

“I am proud to have worked with Mr. A through his struggles and successes and I feel hopeful that he will continue on this positive path for himself, his wife, and his daughter.”

Supervising Probation Officer

## Reducing Risks

After serving a 26-month term of imprisonment for a drug-related offense, Mr. A was required to serve a four-year term of supervised release, which was overseen by the United States Probation Office for the Northern District of Illinois. Mr. A was found to be of lower risk but was also found to face risk factors involving his cognitions, social networks, education, employment, mental health, and controlled substance use. The assigned United States Probation Officer (USPO) worked with Mr. A to identify and make changes to Mr. A’s thinking errors, diagnose and treat multiple mental health disorders, diagnose and treat a substance use disorder, and improve upon Mr. A’s social support network. Through implementation of substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, medication monitoring, use of a strategy to improve cognitions, and identification of career goals, Mr. A made substantial improvements to his life and became a clear success story. In the words of the assigned USPO, the reduction in risk posed to and by Mr. A “is a testament to how hard he worked to make necessary changes through the course of the last four years.” Mr. A was married, learned to address the aforementioned risk factors, and secured employment that led to a position as a trade foreman. The assigned USPO wrote, “I am proud to have worked with Mr. A through his struggles and successes and I feel hopeful that he will continue on this positive path for himself, his wife, and his daughter.”

“One of the most rewarding experiences for any probation officer is to see a person under supervision utilizing lessons they learn from the officer in real-life situations and realizing the benefits of new life approaches.”

## Intervention: The Cognitive-Behavioral Model

One of the many ways in which United States Probation Officers train to work with persons under supervision is to discuss and practice meaningful ways of interacting with the persons with the goal of changing the persons' thought patterns, social networks, employment and substance use. One of the most rewarding experiences for any probation officer is to see a person under supervision utilizing lessons they learn from the officer in real-life situations and realizing the benefits of new life approaches. Recently, a supervisory officer had a conversation with Ms. B that highlighted just such an instance. Ms. B had recollected a correctional exercise in which she had participated with her assigned probation officer which was useful in learning about the most adaptive ways to treat other people and how to allow others to treat her. Though Ms. B had a criminal history including some violent acts, Ms. B described a recent argument she had with her partner that was handled in a much more appropriate way, devoid of any escalation into violence. Ms. B described the feelings she had during the argument and the way in which the aforesaid exercise assisted her in resolving the argument in a way of which she could be proud. In describing this encounter, the supervisor wrote “Change takes time and requires a lot of hard work, like the work the probation officer utilized to help Ms. B.” The supervisor further wrote, “Thanks to officers like (the assigned probation officer) Ms. B has been given tools to help her change her thinking and improve her life.”



The Cognitive-Behavioral Model

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## Reasons for Change

An unfortunate reality of the community corrections field of work is that some persons under supervision will face setbacks, sometimes including revocations of supervision and a return to custody. In the case of Mr. C, a revocation led to a one-day imprisonment term with credit for time served to be followed by a 24-month term of supervised release. Mr. C's original conviction was for a weapons offense, and he had an extensive criminal history including convictions for gang-related, violent offenses. When initially interviewed by an assigned probation officer, Mr. C explained he "should probably just go back to court" given his dislike for following rules. However, Mr. C also spoke of a young son to whom he had made a promise of always being there for him. Mr. C found a job, and the assigned probation officer encouraged him to keep his promise to his son. A common theme of the probation officer's communication with Mr. C was that Mr. C had choices to make, but to keep in mind that choices and decisions either yield benefits or consequences. The newer dynamic was that his choices would not only impact him, but also his son. The probation officer also encouraged Mr. C to view supervised release as an opportunity to avail himself of many resources rather than as a punishment. In describing the approach for Mr. C, the probation officer wrote, "At the end of the day, everything gets tied to his son, girlfriend, and employment." The probation officer noted that Mr. C has been working overtime, which keeps his time structured, keeps him away from negative associates, and puts legitimate money in his pocket. Mr. C has received a pay increase and is a team leader. He has obtained a driver's license, purchased a new vehicle, is participating in Commercial Driver's License training, and is expecting another child. Reinforcement of these successes appears to be motivating him to achieve even more. Mr. C is becoming more cooperative, and he seems to be less defensive. The most welcome interactions come when Mr. C text messages or calls his officer when something good happens. The assigned officer wrote, "Hopefully, the promise he made to his son will not be broken."

