

A COMPARISON OF PATERSON JUVENILES UNDER PROBATION SUPERVISION BEFORE  
AND AFTER IMPLEMENTATION OF  
THE PATERSON JUVENILE JUSTICE VILLAGE INITIATIVE

Are Probation/Police Partnerships Effective Models for Probation Supervision?

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative brings together the Passaic Vicinage Probation Division, the Paterson Police Department, Paterson Public Schools, and community members to seek solutions to the problems faced by city youth. The partnerships have been successful in facilitating close working relationships and the exchange of information concerning individual youths and groups of youth who are on probation. One result is probation now has a strong presence in all of the city's public schools, talking to administrators, teachers, counselors, students and parents regularly. Police and probation conduct joint evening field activities to monitor juveniles on probation in Paterson. This partnership was the focus of the study and the focus of this paper.

The Village Initiative takes an active approach to monitoring the youth under probation's supervision and holds them accountable. The partnership with the Paterson Police allows probation officers to conduct nighttime visits to the homes of juvenile probationers in high crime areas. Teams of two to three probation officers ride in an unmarked police car with a plainclothes police officer. A back up unit with supervisory personnel follows the team providing oversight and decision-making as needed.

Probation prepares agendas before each evening's activity with about 25 juveniles that have been referred for a visit. Referrals come from the probation officers, the schools, the community and parents. Types of referrals from probation officers can be to verify an address, speak to the parent, address problems the child is having at home, school or in the community, check curfew compliance, remind parent and child of a court date or to get a "feel" for the home environment.

The schools refer juveniles with truancy problems or problems that need to be discussed with a parent. The schools have difficulty reaching some parents and the Initiative's evening field activities provide an opportunity to address school issues with a parent in their home. The probation caseloads are school based and lists of probationers are shared with the schools. This facilitates the exchange of information between probation and the schools.

Referrals from the police are included. Probation provides a weekly list of active juvenile probationers to police. The police in turn provide probation with a list of juvenile referrals made on those juveniles that are on probation. These are reports police prepare on juveniles they have contact with during the week, which may or may not result in charges, but invariably indicate a problem in the child's life that

needs to be addressed.

The police and the schools provide additional "eyes and ears" to probation, allowing probation to intervene with the juvenile sooner. The Initiative partners hope that this more holistic approach to supervision will ultimately result in reduced recidivism and fewer juveniles being incarcerated.

In addition to referrals from probation, the schools, and police, the initiative is open to referrals from the community. The probation division takes every opportunity to publicize its approach to encourage the community to have input into the operations. If there is a particular street corner with a lot of juveniles congregating, the corner will be added to the agenda and the Initiative will stop and speak to the juveniles. Any juveniles on probation will be advised not to frequent the location and will be sent home. The Initiative is working with the community to identify resources for the juveniles and seeks to get the community involved in developing new resources.

Once the agenda is completed and all team members are briefed, the evening begins. The roles of the police and probation have been clearly delineated. Probation sets the agenda and determines where the team goes and what it will do. When the team approaches a residence, the probation officer makes the first contact. The residents are advised of the nature of the visit and advised that police officers are with probation to provide for the officers' safety. If the probation officers enter the home, permission is requested to allow the police officers to enter. If a room is searched, it is searched by the probation officers, not by the police. Probation and police are respectful and courteous at all times. The police officers are instructed ahead of time as to how the operation will proceed and the expectations.

The Initiative is modeled after the successful and acclaimed Boston probation/police collaboration known as Operation Night Light. The Boston Partnership began in 1991 and the last few years have seen a proliferation of similar programs throughout the country. A survey of the literature found that none have been evaluated as to their effectiveness in reducing recidivism. There have been no evaluations to determine program effectiveness as a model for juvenile probation supervision.

To assess the effectiveness of the Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative, two populations of juvenile probationers were compared. The control group consisted of 103 Paterson juveniles placed on probation between April and July 1997. This group predated the Initiative's implementation. Probation records and other automated systems were searched to obtain information regarding school enrollment, employment, and drug use. Records were searched seeking information regarding compliance with specific court orders to pay financial obligations and perform community service. And finally, the records were searched to determine the rates of re-offending. The same information was culled from the records of 84 Paterson juveniles placed on probation between March and July 1998. The difference in population size is due to a decline in arrests both in the city of Paterson and countywide. These juveniles were placed on probation at the time the Initiative began. After the data was collected a comparison was made between the two groups.

In addition to the comparison between juveniles, surveys were distributed. Surveys were given to parents and juveniles whose homes were visited during the fall of 1999. The surveys were given to the juveniles and their parent/guardian immediately after Initiative team members visited. The back-up unit conducted the survey with assistance from a college intern. The parents were advised the survey was being conducted as part of an evaluation of the Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative to determine its effectiveness. If needed, the survey was read to them and they were asked to circle their response. A Spanish version was available to parents more comfortable with that language. Probation officers and police officers were surveyed. Members of the operation's board were surveyed.

## Findings

Both groups were compared in three areas: behavior, court order compliance and recidivism. School enrollment, employment and drug use were identified as quantifiable for this analysis. On first look, school enrollment was up 9.1% for the 1998 group, while employment was down 3.81%. Drug use was decreased in the 1998 group 9.63% over the previous year.

Closer analysis of the two years indicates that although school enrollment was up, it was also up 20.73% at the time probation began in 1998 compared to 1997. Employment for the 1998 group was down both at the time probation supervision began and at the time of the follow up one year later.

Of interest was the finding that for both the 1997 group and the 1998 group, drug use decreased about 30% (30.01% among the 1997 group and 29.76% among the 1998 group) after being under probation supervision for one year. There was a 9.97% decrease among the 1998 group compared to the 1997 group in drug use at the time probation supervision began, lessening the significance of the 9.63% decrease shown at the time of follow up for the two groups.

The above indicates that the first year of the Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative did not make a significant impact on the juveniles' behaviors as identified by school enrollment, employment and drug use. However, one can conclude that probation supervision as done in the Passaic Vicinage with regular monitoring by urine testing is effective in reducing drug use for juveniles on probation. Both years, comparing the initial data at the beginning of the probation term, with the follow up data a year later, show close to a 30% drop in drug use.

Regarding court order compliance in paying financial obligations, the percentage of juveniles paying 100% of their court ordered financial obligations increased by 6.19%. Fifty-six percent fully paid the obligations in the 1997 group while 62% percent paid in the 1998 group. The 1998 group actually had 37.92% increase in the average amount ordered resulting in an actual decrease in the overall percent collected. The increased financial orders were primarily due to mandatory fines for drug offenses. These fines were imposed to a greater extent than in previous years. **Nevertheless, the percentage paying the financial order in full within one year increased.**

**There was a 17.01% increase in completion of community service orders in 1998 from 1997.** The 1998 group received fewer mandated community service hours. The average number of hours received decreased in 1998 by 6.68 hours.

The comparison of subsequent charges provides a more compelling indication that the Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative may be on the right track. The percent of technical violations of probation increased by 11.41% in 1998 over 1997. This would be expected due to increased monitoring. For the first time, curfew compliance is looked at regularly and probation is able to determine whether or not a juvenile is compliant with the court order. Recidivism or the percent of juveniles arrested on new complaints within one year of being placed on probation decreased by 13.58%. The 1997 population re-offended at a rate of 50.48% while the 1998 population re-offended at a rate of 36.90%. **The most significant of all was the percentage of juveniles that were not arrested during the year after being placed on probation and did not violate the terms of their probation. The percentage increased by 19.33% in 1998.**

Probation officers and police officers were surveyed during early October 1999. Surveys were only distributed to those who regularly participate in evening field activities. Because of the limited number of surveys, conclusions are of limited value. Those who participate believe in the value of the partnership, and believe the program should become part of standard procedures and should be expanded to other communities. Officers from the police department and the probation division have

learned skills from each other to enhance their own job skills. Neither police nor probation officers feel there is confusion in roles and both believe the roles complement each other.

Parents/guardians were surveyed during October and November 1999. Overall, 96% of all parents surveyed believed it was a good idea for probation to visit in the evening (85% strongly and 11% somewhat agree), 97% have a better understanding of probation and 86% feel probation and police visits help control the juvenile's behavior. Parents have indicated that both police and probation are respectful during initiative visits.

Juveniles surveyed gave more mixed responses. Still, 69% believed it was a good idea for probation officers to visit evening and weekends. Seventy-five percent stated they were more likely to be home if they think probation will visit, 91% have a better understanding of what is expected of them and 74% believed the Initiative visits help them to control their behavior. Results of the surveys given to the regular participants on the operations board were as expected. Those who regularly attend the weekly meetings believe in the program and believe it is working.

## Conclusions

This study sought to compare two sets of juvenile probationers. The control group consisted of juveniles placed on probation before the Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative was implemented. The experimental group was comprised of juveniles placed on probation at the same time the Initiative began. Data was collected at the time they were placed on probation and one year later. The information was analyzed in terms of the juveniles' behavior as evidenced by school enrollment, employment and drug use. Court order compliance defined as payment of court ordered financial obligations and community service were examined. And finally, recidivism was looked at.

There was no evidence that the Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative had any notable effect on school enrollment, employment or drug use. Evidence seems to indicate that probation supervision with regular monitoring of drug use by urine testing reduces drug use by 30%.

Juveniles were more likely to pay court imposed financial obligations and more likely to complete court ordered community service during the first year of the Village Initiative compared to the previous year.

Increased monitoring of the juveniles increased the percentage of violations of probation filed, but juveniles during 1998 were less likely to re-offend. The number of juveniles that remained arrest free and were fully compliant with probation increased.

All survey results were generally favorable to the program. The percentage of parents favoring the Initiative exceeded 95% and 69% of juveniles were in favor of the Initiative. The results confirmed anecdotal feedback police and probation officers have been hearing for the past year from the families.

During the first year of the Paterson Juvenile Justice Village Initiative, the police/probation teams conducted 86 field activities during evenings and weekends. Over 1840 visits were made to juveniles homes, 785 curfew checks were made with an average of a 61% compliance rate, 445 street contacts were made, and 158 warrants were executed. None of the activities would have been possible without the assistance of the Paterson Police Department.

The initial role of police officers providing an umbrella of safety for probation officers quickly expanded. Probation and police have formed a true partnership. Information sharing between the two

agencies has enhanced probation's ability to intervene more quickly, thus reducing delinquent behavior and avoiding incarceration. Probation officers have learned skills from the police and the police have learned skills from probation. Rather than conflict, the roles of probation officers and police officers complement each other.

The partnership with the schools has expanded to probation being present in Paterson public schools regularly. Names of juveniles at risk and on probation are shared and solutions to their problems are sought through the partnership between probation and the schools. Statistics have shown that the number of Passaic County juveniles being incarcerated decreased in 1998 and continues to decrease in 1999.

To fully assess the success of police/probation partnerships would require additional studies perhaps over a longer period of time. The results from this study appear to indicate the partnership is effective in increasing court order compliance and reducing recidivism.

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