

Probation Department **Introduces New Offender Assessment Program**

The Probation Department is one of the main branches of the criminal justice system in Barbados; it oversees the administering of community-based sentences and related orders imposed by the courts and it provides the courts with information on offenders to aid the decision making process by judges and magistrates. Throughout the years the department has implemented significant changes to enhance and strengthen the services provided as well as its organizational structure. According to the former Chief Probation Officer, Carlos Mason in the department's annual report for 2002-2003, "the department focuses not only on issues relating to its organizational development and operational delivery of its core business, but on the development of new ways to increase our capability in the area of rehabilitation and reducing re-offending". Rehabilitation of offenders is one of the core objectives of the Probation Department.

With regards to developmental changes in the area of rehabilitation and re-offending, the Probation Department has actively sought to implement more up-to-date offender assessment materials to be administered as part of the rehabilitative component. Currently, the probation officers conduct offender assessment using a social enquiry report (SER). This report would contain basic information on their clients, which would be used to determine the type of punishment he/she would receive in court as well as the type of rehabilitative program administered. Although the social enquiry report serves its purpose, there are several limitations and this tool does not accurately or scientifically provides a detailed current assessment of the risks and needs of offenders in order to effectively administer an appropriate form of action.



A need for a formal risk/needs assessment system to be implemented in the Probation Department was expressed for some time. Implementing a standardized risk/needs assessment instrument to be administered by probation officers would improve the services provided and the quality of decisions made. After careful in-depth research, a system was found and approved. The Canadian system, Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) was deemed the best suited to be introduced in Barbados. This instrument would be used to better understand the risk/need of offenders to assist in the rehabilitation process.

The LSI-R model was developed in Canada by Dr. Don Andrews and Dr. Jim Bonta and administered among offenders age 16 and older. It is used to help predict parole outcomes, success in correctional halfway houses, institutional misconducts and recidivism. The instrument consists of 54 risk/need items that sample the common domains relevant to correctional clients. These domains may cover an individual's criminal history, education/employment, financial status, family/marital status, living/accommodations, leisure/recreation,

companions, alcohol/drug use, emotional/personal and attitude/orientation. All the information collected is used to make decisions about risk and treatment of offenders. It is completed through an interview and file review process that is normally completed in approximately 30 minutes. The LSI-R instrument is widely favored over other correctional assessment tools as it contains many changeable items, which are useful for adjusting resource allocation upon changes in the offender and his/her situation.

Permission to commence the LSI-R project at the Probation Department was received on 2003, from the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Probation Department in collaboration with the National Task Force on Crime Prevention was given the task of making the staff of the probation department, LSI-R efficient. A proposal for LSIR- training of probation officers was received from Dr.David Simourd, a forensic consultant who studied under the developers of the LSI-R instrument, Dr.Bonta and Dr.Andrews. The services of Dr.Simourd were contracted for the LSI-R training of probation officers, and the project was conducted in three phases:

- 1) Basic training of probation and community service officers,
- 2) Evaluation of the officers training
- 3) Final/booster training session.

Dr. Simourd conducted basic training at the Probation Department and 22 officers were selected to undergo the training. The training was a two-day session where officers were introduced to the LSI-R instrument. Participants were familiarized with the fundamentals of the instrument and shown how to administer, score and interpret the results of the LSI-R.

For the evaluation phase of the project video recordings were conducted and completed in December 2004. In spite of the long break between the basic training in October 2003 and the evaluation phase, the probation officers remained keen and still quite knowledgeable of the information regarding the LSI-R instrument due to the training they received. Probation officers were videotaped while administering the LSI-R instrument to their clients (probationers). Dr. Simourd reviewed the videotaped sessions conducted by the officers and made an assessment. On completion of the evaluation phase, Dr. Simourd returned in February 2005 to conduct the booster training, the final phase of the project.

The purpose of the booster training was to review the videotaped interview sessions for feedback purposes and to enhance the skills acquired in administering the LSI-R instrument from the basic training session. Dr. Simourd also focused on integrating LSI-R information into case planning, case management using LSI-R as well as quality assurance. The booster training marked the final stage of the LSI-R project. At the end of the training, Dr. Simourd certified a number of probation officers as being competent to administer LSI-R independently. Along with the social enquiry report, probation

officers would be able to use the LSI-R to conduct a formal offender assessment and give better-informed background information on their clients. Magistrates and Judges as a result would be better able to make an appropriate decision based on the level of risks and needs of an individual indicated by the LSI-R instrument. However, in order for LSI-R to be recognized by the judiciary and applied in the decision making process, it's members would have to be sensitized to the instrument.

Given the great benefits of this instrument in correctional departments in Canada, USA and UK and in order for Barbados to come on stream with other countries in regards to offender assessment programs, the application of the LSI-R instrument would have to be administered in all correctional facilities within the criminal justice system. The future of LSI-R in Barbados looks quite positive as there is discussion regarding the introduction of the instrument in other correctional facilities on the island. This instrument allows for offenders to be more accurately assessed and placed in a treatment or rehabilitative program that would cater to their needs whether they are considered high risk or low risk. Dr. Simourd, during his time here in February, discussed the future application of the instrument with key personnel from Government Industrial Schools as well as Her Majesty's Prisons. There is a mutual interest among all relevant parties about the use of the LSI-R instrument for offender assessment, which would enhance the treatment and rehabilitation programs already in use.

The Probation Department although having successfully completed the pilot LSI-R program will have more ground to cover before the use of the LSI-R instrument is fully integrated into the organization. The National Task Force on Crime Prevention will continue to oversee the integration of LSI-R into the daily practice of probation officers as well as seek to certify more officers in the application of LSI-R. Efforts will be made to fully equip the Probation department with the necessary resources to independently coordinate all LSI-R activities. For more efficient and accurate scientific assessment of offenders, the LSI-R instrument is definitely the right way forward for corrections in Barbados.



