

CEP Presentation December 2009

- **Introduction to Presenters:** Coral Sirdifield - works as a Research Assistant in a Criminal Justice and Health research team in the UK. Mark Gardner works as a Probation Officer, and also has experience of working in mental health settings
- **Outline:** The presenters will provide a very brief outline of the training for Probation Officers in the UK. However, they won't spend too much time on this because the audience will have already had some information about the UK system earlier in the day
- Instead, the presenters would like to focus on the idea that mental health awareness training should be a key part of any training for Probation Officers anywhere in the world. They would like to tell the audience:
 - Why they think this is the case, and then
 - Look in some detail at a short course which was piloted and evaluated in one region in the UK
 - – looking at what the training involves, and how it evaluated
- Then the presenters would like to finish with a few questions for the audience to prompt discussion in the rest of the workshop
- **Probation training in the UK:** A brief overview of training for Probation Officers in the UK. To qualify as a Probation Officer, staff now have to study for a degree, and also get an NVQ level 4 in Community Justice over a period of two-years. One strong point of our system is that the training is a mixture of academic study and work experience. However, a weakness is that only a very small part of the training focuses on mental health. Also, there are very few opportunities for other grades of probation staff, some of which do face-to-face work with offenders to learn about mental health, and the presenters of this workshop believe that there should be more focus on this area
- **Why focus on mental health?** Whilst a lot of research has focused on the mental health of prisoners – finding that a very high proportion of prisoners have mental health problems, relatively little research has focused on offenders in the community. A research team at the University of Lincoln (UK) recently conducted a Health Needs Assessment of offenders on probation in two counties in the UK which showed that on the SF-36 tool, offenders' mental health was scored as worse than that of the manual class in the general population. Also, 17% of offenders completing the survey reported that mental health was their greatest health problem.

Staff at the University of Lincoln are also currently working on a study using standardised assessment tools to investigate the prevalence of mental health problems amongst offenders on probation in Lincolnshire. Early results from this study suggest that around half of offenders in this county have mental health problems. So, from the limited research done to date, we know that quite high proportions of offenders on probation are likely to have mental health problems

There has been increasing focus on the health of offenders in UK policy over the last decade or so, with prison health care now being provided by the NHS, and in-reach teams being introduced into prisons to support prisoners with serious mental illness. A growing number of prisons and probation areas are now employing offenders and ex-offenders to work with their peers to encourage them to access health services and

to lead healthier lifestyles. Recently, Lord Bradley led a review of people with mental health or learning disabilities in the criminal justice system in England. One key theme in this review was the need for mental health awareness training for staff throughout all areas of the criminal justice system.

Training probation staff to recognise the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders helps them to meet their core aims of both protecting the public (risk assessment) and rehabilitating offenders. Ultimately this may also contribute to reducing re-offending as offenders receive appropriate treatment and support. Knowledge of this subject can also help staff to make more informed recommendations on sentencing to the courts, and to understand any psychiatric reports that they receive about their cases.

So there are many reasons to focus on mental health in probation training. A large proportion of offenders on probation are likely to be mentally ill. In addition, health is an area that current criminal justice policy is paying increasing attention to in the UK, and providing mental health awareness training can have practical benefits for both probation staff and offenders.

- **Project Background:** Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Trust started to provide this type of training to fill a gap that they saw in training for their staff. Mark (presenter) led this course and it was very popular – with every session being full. Coral Sirdifield (presenter) and Mark then developed the course into the workbook that you’ve seen on display at the conference and piloted it in several probation areas in the UK
- **Course Outline:** see slides
- **Some examples:** The presenters will give some examples of the types of information covered in the training, and briefly discuss what the bi-polar disorder training session would look like. They will also briefly discuss the practicalities of delivering the course – e.g. combining a ‘cost-saving’ train the trainer approach with buying in local experts from probation (e.g. Mark!) or individuals working in your own local services - who can present about what their service has to offer to offenders on probation
- **Evaluation results:** The presenters will present the results of the evaluation
- **Conclusion:** see slides
- **Questions for the audience:** The presenters will pose a number of questions for people to think about during the rest of the workshop and give their contact details for anyone who wants to know more about the training course