Intensive Probation: An Alternative to Placement

by Megan Clouser

Probation has long served as the backbone of the juvenile justice system with national statistics showing almost all youths referred to the juvenile courts coming into contact with a probation department at one time during their case processing. In addition to the pre-adjudicatory functions of juvenile probation, the court-ordered probation supervision of a youth is the most frequently utilized dispositional option in family and juvenile courts today.

Youths placed on probationary supervision are typically those juveniles for whom residential placement is not warranted, yet who would most likely continue down the path of delinquency if not provided with some additional guidance. Such supervision may include contact with the probation officer once a week or once a month depending on the assessed needs of the youth. In addition, probation officers may monitor youths’ outside activities such as school attendance and may refer youths to outside services (i.e., drug and alcohol counseling) if determined necessary.

However, in the everyday practice of juvenile justice, Pennsylvania officials recognized the demand for intermediate service options to meet the needs of those children for whom neither conventional probation nor residential placement services offered the appropriate level of supervision. For these children, removal from their home environment was not deemed necessary, yet traditional probation services would not provide the high level of oversight required to assure success.

Thus, the idea of intensive probation was conceived as a community-based alternative to residential placement. Most simply, intensive probation is an enhancement of traditional probation services. A youth sentenced to intensive probation would receive traditional probation services augmented by more frequent face-to-face interactions with the probation officer, closer monitoring of the youth’s activities outside of these contacts (including home, school, and employment), and more frequent evaluations of the youth’s progress.

The first intensive probation program identified in Pennsylvania was developed and implemented by Erie County in 1977. The success of this pilot program spurred both the replication of this model in several other Pennsylvania counties in the early 1980’s and the development of a state-wide initiative in 1984 to further expand the availability of intensive program services and monitor program success.

This issue of Pennsylvania Progress will highlight the experience of Erie County in implementing its intensive probation program model, describe the collaborative efforts of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and provide additional information on the topic presented.
In May 1977, Erie County initiated the first formal intensive juvenile probation program in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The program was designed to provide the habitual and/or the high-risk offender one last alternative to placement. Start-up funds for this program were acquired through the Governor’s Justice Commission (the predecessor of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency) to support the hiring of two intensive probation officers.

The Erie County intensive probation program is a five-stage model requiring juveniles to successfully complete a 187-day supervision cycle. For any day that the juvenile does not meet all conditions of probation, the day is defined as unsuccessful and an additional day is added to the juvenile’s probationary period. In addition, the juvenile must pass a written exam at the end of each phase demonstrating an understanding of his individual goals and program rules.

The program begins with seven days of house arrest during which time the juvenile must contact his probation officer each evening and is instructed on the requirements for successful completion of the following four stages of supervision. Upon the successful completion of house arrest and the written exam, the juvenile is graduated into Phase I of intensive probation.

Requirements for the juvenile in Phase I include keeping a daily record of progress towards individual goals, obtaining weekly progress reports from teachers, reporting, in person, to his probation officer twice a week, and attending self-help group sessions offered through the probation department once a week. In addition, the probation officer conducts a weekly visit to both the juvenile’s home and school, conducts three curfew checks a week, and requires the juvenile to submit to drug screenings every ten days.

After successful completion of Phase I, a youth is graduated into Phase II. Lasting sixty days, this phase involves slightly less supervision with bi-weekly drug screenings, bi-weekly progress reports from the schools, and only two curfew checks per week. In Phase III, also lasting sixty days, drug screenings are given at random and, depending on the individual juvenile’s progress, daily recording of goals and school progress report requirements may also be lightened.

The final thirty-day stage, Phase IV, involves “weaning” the juvenile and family from dependence on the juvenile probation officer. During this phase, requirements on the juvenile are individualized by the probation officer depending on the youth’s needs and parental responsibility for youth supervision is stressed during the weekly home visits.

In its first year of operation, Erie County juvenile courts referred thirty-three youths to intensive probation services in lieu of placement. Of these youths, eighteen successfully completed the program by the end of 1977 and fifteen either remained under supervision into 1978 or were returned to the juvenile courts on new charges of delinquency.

After the expiration of grant funding, Erie County Commissioners agreed to assume responsibility for program funding based on its initial successes in youth rehabilitation and the cost-savings offered the county by utilizing intensive probation versus residential placement. Today, almost two decades later, the program continues to operate with a staff of five: three full-time intensive probation officers, a supervisor, and one full-time secretary.

In 1994, Erie County juvenile courts referred a total of thirty-eight youths for intensive probation services. Of these youths, thirteen successfully completed the program in 1994, sixteen continued services into 1995, and nine were returned to the juvenile courts on new charges of delinquency.

The success of Erie County’s efforts coupled with a continued state interest in the establishment of community-based alternatives to placement provided sufficient impetus for the establishment of intensive probation services in a number of other Pennsylvania counties in the early 1980’s.

The development of these new programs was primarily supported by subgrant funds made available by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. With the number of applications for
intensive probation funding growing steadily each year, the Commission joined forces with the state's Juvenile Court Judges' Commission in 1984 to begin a formal state-wide initiative to establish, monitor, and evaluate new intensive probation programs.

The Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission proved the ideal agent to promote this initiative due to its high level of interaction with county juvenile courts and their probation departments. The Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, founded in 1959, serves in an advisory capacity to the juvenile courts, provides regulatory standards for juvenile programs administered through the courts, and administers a state grant-in-aid program to financially support the provision of juvenile probation services.

In its capacity as the Coordinator for Intensive Probation Services, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission received a grant of $600,000 from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency in 1984. The Juvenile Court Judges' Commission then assumed responsibility for reviewing county subgrant applications for start-up funds, distributing the appropriate subgrant monies, monitoring program activities, and evaluating program success.

Through this initiative each applicant county was awarded grant funds up to a maximum of $20,000 per position for the first year of operation and up to $12,000 per position during the second year. For the third and subsequent years of operation, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission provided $3,000 per intensive probation position through the established state grant-in-aid program.

This effort supported the establishment of eleven new intensive probation programs in its first year. A total of thirty-two counties (including both new and continued intensive probation programs) participated in this initiative at some time throughout its five-year duration.

**PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES**

In addition to its potential to provide a cost-effective alternative to residential placement, the intensive probation program model was able to achieve such high levels of replication success due to the regulatory efforts of the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission. The Commission devised the Intensive Probation Standards outlined on page four to help counties incorporate the key elements of successful programs into their new initiatives. These standards provide a general framework for new programs while still allowing enough flexibility that each county could tailor services to meet the specific needs of juveniles coming within their care.

The standards remain in effect today with counties reporting high levels of voluntary compliance. Moreover, many counties report broadening their range of services on either a program-wide or individual basis. For example, Erie county provides recreational and weekend field-trip programs to youths meeting all conditions of probation for a given time period.

In addition, several counties have identified funding to establish intensive probation programs subsequent to 1990, and at least one (Bucks County) offers such services through contracts with private providers.

Pennsylvania Counties Providing Intensive Probation Services
(directly through the county juvenile probation departments)

PROGRAM SUCCESS

Throughout the five-year initiative, the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission monitored the achievement of programs according to the number of youths court-ordered to intensive probation supervision in lieu of placement.

According to the Commission, the overall goal of the initiative was for intensive probation services to reduce court commitments to placement facilities by ten percent in the first year of operation. First year evaluations revealed success in this realm with more than a fourteen percent reduction in placements for participating counties. Over the five-year monitoring period, the total number of court-referrals to intensive probation ranged from a low of 583 in 1986 to a high of 1,038 in 1988.

DIRECTIONS

As of 1995, thirty-nine of Pennsylvania’s sixty-seven counties report the operation of intensive probation programs modeled on the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission’s program standards for operation.

Also, in 1990, the Commonwealth began a specialized intensive probation initiative based on the success of the original model. The new initiative,

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<th>Standards Governing Intensive Probation Services</th>
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<td>I. The intensive probation officer should have a caseload size of no more than fifteen high-risk adjudicated delinquent youths who would otherwise receive placement services.</td>
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<td>II. There must be a minimum of three face-to-face contacts per week with the youth.</td>
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<td>III. There must be a minimum of one contact per week with the parent(s) and/or guardian(s). (face-to-face, telephone, or written).</td>
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<td>IV. There must be a minimum of one contact every two weeks with the youth’s school, employer, and significant others if applicable.</td>
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<td>V. A minimum of thirty percent of the work hours of the intensive probation officer must be scheduled outside normal office hours.</td>
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<td>VI. An intensive probation plan should be developed by the intensive probation officer and approved by the chief juvenile probation officer or his/her designee within ten days after the dispositional decision is made to utilize intensive probation.</td>
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<td>VII. The intensive probation plan shall be reviewed once a month by the intensive probation officer and the chief juvenile probation officer or his/her designee. (The review will be utilized to modify the plan if and when appropriate).</td>
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<td>VIII. The chronological record of all direct and indirect contacts shall include at a minimum: the name of the contacted person; the title/relationship of the contacted person; the time, date, and location of the contact; the type of contact (face-to-face, telephone, etc.); and the nature of the contact.</td>
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<td>IX. Intensive probation services should normally be provided for a minimum of six months to a maximum of twelve months.</td>
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Juvenile Court Standards, Juvenile Court Judges Commission, January 1995, pg. 44.
Drug and Alcohol Intensive Probation, provides a new community-based alternative for youths diagnosed with drug or alcohol problems. Youths serviced by this program may include those juveniles:

- referred on the basis of a violation of the Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act;
- who were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their offense;
- with a previous history of drug and/or alcohol abuse;
- whose assessment indicates a risk of drug/alcohol abuse; and
- upon whom the Court has imposed a condition of drug/alcohol treatment or urinalysis testing.

The Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission developed operational standards for the drug and alcohol efforts to guide replication and encourage consistent service provisions. According to these guidelines, drug and alcohol intensive probation programs must provide a written plan for the urinalysis testing of juveniles that details the circumstances under which testing may occur, the types of offenders who may be tested, who may conduct the tests, the procedures for the provision of results, and the possible sanctions for and ramifications of positive results.

According to the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, twenty Pennsylvania counties currently provide drug and alcohol intensive probation services as an alternative to placement.

Resources Available

Behind every issue of *Pennsylvania Progress*, there is a complete set of technical assistance materials to provide additional, in-depth information to those interested in the topics covered. Resources range from publication listings and contact persons to full-length program reports designed to aid in the replication of successful youth program models. Standard packets are available for every issue with additional services provided to meet the needs of each individual request. For more information on any topic covered in this or other issues of *Pennsylvania Progress*, please write to:

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