



CSSD Chronicle



A regular publication of information and news about Court Support Services Division

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Wednesday, March 25, 2009

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New Training Academy Institutes: Best Practices in Offender Supervision for Adult Probation Officers

The CSSD Training Academy is constantly reviewing curriculums and looking to respond to staff needs. CSSD Executive Director Bill Carbone noted that “The Academy provides essential training to ensure that we can provide the most effective services to clients and the court.” He has supported the expansion of the Academy over the past several years to provide new and innovative learning experiences. One of the most recent efforts in this area is the “Institutes” training curriculum. Each Institute is designed to provide CSSD staff with in-depth information about issues that are of particular concern to them. Responding to officer feedback, Institute topics are those that have not been available as part of their pre-service or in-service professional development up to this point.

The first ever Institute – **Substance Abuse and Mental Health 201** – began last October and will finish its six-session course in March. It was developed for Adult Probation Officers. Twenty-five (25) officers were accepted on a first-come first-serve basis, including officers in specialized units and supervisors. At the end of February, a second offering of this Institute began which will end in late April. The next Institute is being planned for the fall 2009 and will likely be on services and interventions for special needs clients.

BACKGROUND: Laura DiFelice, Manager of the CSSD Training Academy and a Probation Officer/ Supervisor for 20 years, observed that she has long had the idea for a concentrated approach to teaching skills that are so important to delivery of supervision services. From her own experience, she knows how vital it is to have more than just a brief overview of substance abuse and mental health issues. Close to three quarters of clients have one or the other, and increasingly, both conditions. This makes it vital for an officer to understand what these conditions mean in real life, how people act and are affected by these problems, and what are the most effective things that can be done to encourage positive behavior change.

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY & COURSE OUTLINE: The Institute is being taught by Michael Pantalon, Ph.D. Dr. Pantalon is a clinical and school psychologist, and an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine. He has been a trainer for CSSD for over seven years and has trained nearly all of our Juvenile and Adult Probation Officers in the use of Motivational Interviewing. The two, three-day components of this first Institute include:

- **Substance Abuse 201:** A three-day overview of the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of a wide array of substance use problems in adults.
- **Mental Health 201:** A three-day overview of the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of a wide array of mental health problems in adults

In the Substance Abuse portion of the course, participants were taught to identify and explain evidence-based diagnostic criteria, assessment procedures and treatments for various types of substance use problems and disorders. Special emphasis is given to the manner in which probationers exhibit substance abuse problems and how to engage such individuals in an effective process of assessment and treatment.

The Mental Health curriculum provided instruction on how to correctly identify and explain various mental health conditions, including various types of treatments for depression, anxiety, psychosis, mania, personality disorders, and cognitive/neurological deficits. The various psychological and medication based treatments available are also explained as well as how probationers exhibit mental health problems and some best practices on how to engage in an effective process of assessment and treatment.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS: Officers who have taken the Institute course have been very positive about it. They were impressed with the course work and information provided. Adult Probation Officer Rebecca Segui of New Haven had some very positive things to say about this Institute.

SUGGESTIONS? QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? CONCERNS? CONTACT US!

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She noted that her "...understanding of these issues has increased and so has my ability to engage and case plan with clients more effectively. Now I also have the tools to advocate and ensure the most effective services and work more effectively with various treatment providers."

According to Michelle O' Donnell, Probation Officer II, Waterbury Supervision., "The training provided a refreshing, new perspective on working with addicted clients, a new way of listening to what they are telling you and a new way of responding to their use."

Tina Merchant, Chief Probation Officer I, New London, said that the Institute course "... provides the probation officer with the knowledge to assess the appropriateness of treatment ... and to work as part of the treatment team and as an advocate for their client. Of all the trainings I have attended it is the most applicable to understanding and assisting those clients that struggle with substance abuse issues and suffer mental illness."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Laura DiFelice, Manager, CSSD Training Academy at Laura.DiFelice@jud.ct.gov or 860-827-4411.

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