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For further information contact:
Winnie Comfort or Tammy Kendig
609-292-9580

New Jersey Judiciary Celebrates Probation Week

Have you thanked a probation officer today?

That is the question being asked by Kevin M. Brown, assistant director of Probation Services, during National Probation, Parole and Community Supervision Week, which is July 18-24.

“Probation officers are the backbone of many Judiciary operations, said Brown. “Their work not only upholds the rule of law, but also helps probationers to improve their lives and enhances the communities in which they live. This week in particular, we should thank probation officers for the work they do, for their dedication and commitment, and for their professionalism.”

People might imagine that probation officers spend their days sitting at desks and filling out paperwork. In fact, probation officers in the New Jersey Judiciary are on the go at all hours, using high-tech tools that help them meet reporting requirements while they visit probationers at home and at work to ensure their compliance with court-ordered sentences. That means making sure they are working or attending school, abiding by curfews, attending substance abuse programs, performing community service, and paying fines and restitution. They might steer a client toward a job center to look for work, help someone think through past decisions that have led to trouble, or provide just the right combination of encouragement and criticism to motivate an adult or juvenile offender to attain a higher goal.

Not all probation officers work in adult and juvenile probation. Participants in the state’s Intensive Supervision Program, an early-release program for non-violent offenders, are supervised by specially trained officers, as are youth offenders in the Juvenile Intensive Supervision Program. Participants in the Drug Court program, a highly specialized program that helps non-violent drug offenders overcome their addictions through substance abuse treatment and close supervision, rely on probation officers to keep them on the path to recovery.

Some probation officers do not supervise offenders, but act as the courts’ investigators. For example, judges in the criminal courts rely on pre-sentencing reports prepared by probation officers when they make a decision about what sentence to impose. Judges in family court rely on probation officers who research domestic violence cases in order to make risk assessments of alleged batterers. Probation officers perform investigations in child custody disputes, and develop plans to rehabilitate youth offenders in juvenile delinquency cases. Another cadre of probation officers is responsible for enforcing child support orders in family court. They work tirelessly to track payments and use all the tools and technologies available to them to ensure that parents meet their child support obligations.

Not everyone is qualified to be a probation officer, which requires not only special training, but also an ability and aptitude to resolve disputes, to build partnerships, to earn the trust of others and to inspire change. It requires a strong commitment to the rule of law as well as a belief in one’s own ability to improve the lives of others.

“One probation officer can make a difference in the lives of hundreds of people every year,” said Brown. “The best

probation officers are educated and highly-trained professionals who constantly seek to improve their knowledge and skills to provide critical services to their clients and to the community. It is challenging work, but it can be exciting and rewarding work as well. On behalf of the Judiciary and the communities in which we work, I would like to express our admiration and gratitude for our probation professionals.”

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