



Client survey: Probation officers are effective change agents

Overview

In 2023, the Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR) launched a survey to evaluate the relationship between clients and their probation officers. Overall, survey results showed that clients feel they have a strong, positive working alliance with their probation officers.

The Working Alliance Inventory-Short Revised (WAI-SR) survey was initially implemented by DOCCR in 2018 and was adapted and relaunched in 2023. WAI-SR evaluations are used across various industries or practices to assess the working alliance, or relationship, between a client and a provider. The evaluation tool was specifically tailored in this instance to address the client/agent relationship in probation and parole.

The positive feedback provided in these survey results affirms that the department has approached probation supervision in an effective way. At the same time, the clients provided a more comprehensive view of challenges and gaps to address. DOCCR is using this information to evaluate and improve processes and help clients to be successful.

By the numbers



At least 90% of survey respondents:



Said their probation officer has helped accomplish the changes they want to make



Have collaborated and set mutually agreed upon goals



Felt there is mutual respect between them and their probation officer



Believed their probation officer affirms them while they're making positive changes



Said their probation officer listens

Client feedback underscored the importance of recognizing the unintended consequences of complying with probation standards, as well as the importance of providing resources to clients seeking community services.



The surveys included supplemental questions created by DOCCR to further understand the client experience. For adult clients, responses emphasized the dual nature of challenges faced — both personal and systemic; highlighting the importance of DOCCR's efforts to provide a holistic, client-centered approach to probation.



For Transition-Aged Youth clients (age 18 to 24), feedback highlighted the importance of incentives and resources to address their needs. This includes resources for economic stability, fostering positive relationships within the justice system, supporting mental health, and aiding in addressing systemic challenges like transportation and housing.

To improve accessibility, it's crucial to address client barriers, helping to connect them to employment opportunities, fostering social support networks, and recognizing and accommodating the multiple priorities that individuals may be managing.

Why we do this

Probation is about oversight and accountability — and so much more. DOCCR has adopted an approach that views probation officers as change agents who work in collaboration with clients toward change. Evidence shows that when probation officers provide effective oversight and interventions, it results in meaningful and positive change in thinking and behavior. Clients are more likely to desist from criminal behavior and, as a result, communities are safer. This cannot be done if there isn't a mutually respectful and trusting relationship between agent and client.

Surveying clients helps to determine the effectiveness of probation practices and tools, to better understand barriers to success, to assess how new initiatives are working, and to explore opportunities for improvement.

Community restoration is part of the DOCCR mission. When clients are successful and avoid reentry into the criminal justice system, the whole community is safer and healthier.

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