

Job title

Probation officer

General overview

Probation officers are an essential part of the criminal justice system, dealing with offenders who have been granted probation rather than serving a prison sentence. Their ultimate goal is to reintegrate offenders back into the community while providing enough supervision to ensure public safety (Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services, 2013). They accomplish this by preparing pre-sentence reports on the offender, enforcing curfews, and making recommendations to judges when probationary conditions are not being met.

Typical employers in Canada are Correctional Services Canada or its Provincial affiliates. In Ontario, Parole Officers are employed by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012).

Job duties and responsibilities

Parole officers meet regularly with offenders to evaluate how well they are accomplishing pre-set goals and complying with the terms of their probation (O*NET, 2011). They compile reports on offenders' progress and make recommendations for action when offenders have violated conditions of their probation. Additionally, they ensure offenders have access to medical, social, and rehabilitation services when needed. It is worth noting that a typical Probation Officer in Canada will manage between 20 and 35 offenders at any given time.

Typical workday

Probation officers experience variety in their workday. Typically it will involve a combination of writing reports, meeting with offenders and reporting their findings to judges or other relevant members of the criminal justice system. Though a portion of their job involves visiting halfway homes to talk to offenders, the majority of their work is done in an office setting. These offices are located in Community Corrections buildings or local courthouses (Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services, 2013b). Certain job duties may force the officer to work well into his or her evenings and weekends, for example when conducting interviews with offenders' friends, families, and employers. Additionally, the officer will often deal with dangerous offenders. These individuals may suffer from various forms of mental illness or drug and alcohol issues. Parole Officers frequently use computers and other communication tools to compile reports, organize and schedule their caseload, and provide information to colleagues and the court system (Career Cruising, 2013).

Educational requirements and other qualifications

Most provinces, as well as Correctional Services Canada, require potential applicants to hold at least a four-year bachelor's degree, preferably in the social sciences. Employers also have a strong preference for those with prior work experience in the social services or with community agencies, including volunteer work or internships (Career Cruising, 2013). Due to the nature of the job, applicants must also pass a police record check. Once

hired, new Parole Officers undergo an extensive training program to learn effective correctional intervention skills (Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services, 2013).

Related skills, interests and qualities

Writing skills are essential to the job, as Parole Officers must prepare many detailed reports regarding offender progress and specific case management plans. Oral communication and interpersonal skills are important as Officers must articulate goals and expectations clearly to offenders in order to establish constructive working relationships with them. It is also beneficial to have a strong interest in the legal system and social welfare as Parole Officers are helping reintroduce problem individuals back into society. Because the Parole Officer deals with many other parts of the Criminal Justice System and often handles a very large caseload, the ideal candidate is very organized, able to meet tight deadlines, and can handle working in stressful situations.

Relevance of Psychology undergraduate degree

Many aspects of undergraduate training in Psychology are relevant to the job. Understanding of individual differences in personality, motivation and performance can provide greater insight into each offender and allow the Officer to develop higher quality relationships with clients. Similarly, understanding of the social, psychological and cognitive factors underlying behaviour can aid in the Officer's risk assessment duties. Finally, knowledge of professional ethics, statistical analysis and research methodology are rewarding in designing, implementing, and assessing the effectiveness of new case management programs.

Courses related to Forensic Psychology are beneficial to the job as they provide a general overview of the criminal justice system, criminal behaviour, risk assessment strategies and treatment programs, often within a Canadian context. Additionally, courses in Personality Psychology may help the future Parole Officers to better understand individual differences and the thoughts and behaviours that make each offender unique. Finally, a course on Motivation and Emotion may be beneficial in helping Parole Officers design and implement successful programs to reduce recidivism and facilitate offender reintegration into the community.

Salary potential

Median hourly wage in Canada: \$34.18

Median hourly wage in Ontario: \$36.06

These figures are considerably higher than in the United States, where in 2012 the reported median hourly wage was \$23.07, and an average annual salary of \$48,196.

Job outlook

Job outlook appears promising for Probation Officers. In the United States, there is an expected 10-19% growth in Probation Officer positions between 2010 and 2020, with a projected 37,000 new openings. Though not every province has published similar research, the province of Quebec has published that job prospects for Probation Officers and similar occupations are fair, and that the average annual growth rate for these

occupations is 0.6%, slightly lower than the average annual growth rate for all occupations, which is 0.7% (Service Canada, 2013).

To apply

In Ontario, there are three ways to get involved in probation services:

1. Submit a letter of interest to a local probation office/parole board.
2. Apply for a posted opening on the Government of Ontario website.
3. Contact local probation office about potential volunteer positions.

To know more

To know more, you can visit the Government of Ontario website at:

http://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/corr_serv/careers_in_corr/careers_pp_officer/careers_pp_officer.html

or Correctional Services Canada at:

<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/careers/index-eng.shtml>

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