

Building a network for British Overseas Territories and remote/rural probation provisions – a legacy of the 5th World Congress on Probation and Parole

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A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's hands and arms. The person is wearing a dark green jacket and is sitting. They are holding a blue pen and writing in an open notebook. A black smartphone is resting on the left page of the notebook. The background is out of focus, showing other people in a room, suggesting a conference or meeting setting.

Building a network for British Overseas Territories and remote/rural probation provisions – a legacy of the 5th World Congress on Probation and Parole

By Fiona Campbell, Laura Aston and Nicola Robinson

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The 5th World Congress on Probation and Parole was held in Ottawa, Canada from 28th September to 1st October 2022. The congress is held every two years with the aim of bringing together practitioners, academics, researchers, and related organisations with a common interest in probation, parole, and community justice globally. The theme for 2022 was “No One Left Behind: Building Community Capacity”. The conference heard from representatives from Europe, Africa, Asia, UK, USA and of course Canada on topics ranging from developing community interventions, current research and what ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘best practice’ looks like in probation. This year, the conference had representatives from St Helena Island for the second time, and the Falkland Islands for the first time. In this article we share our observations on networking, learning and development opportunities following our time together at the World Congress. We conclude by introducing the Community Justice Overseas Territories (CJOT) network of support we have established for probation and community justice provisions across the British Overseas Territories and beyond - a legacy of our experiences at the World Congress on Probation and Parole.

Both St Helena and the Falkland Islands are small, remote British Overseas Territories (BOTs) situated in the South Atlantic with England and

Wales qualified Probation Officers (POs) providing the island’s probation provision on mid- to long-term contracts. As the islands’ POs are typically on career breaks from HMPPS, the trend has long been to look to England and Wales to develop these small but important probation services. However, attendance at the World Congress was an important reminder that learning from each other and those in similar contexts, as well as exploring good practice and opportunities for learning and development further afield, is particularly beneficial to the work delivered by these remote island services and their practitioners.

The Probation Services in St Helena and the Falkland Islands are comparatively new, established in 2013 following the arrival of England & Wales qualified probation officers for the first time. Although probation work had been a feature of both island’s criminal justice systems prior to this it had been delivered *ad-hoc* by professionals from prison, or health and social care roles. The breadth of work completed by probation officers ranges from pre-sentence reports and facilitating supervision and intervention across the community and custodial estate, to identifying, developing, and delivering community service provisions.

Probation officers also provide support on a non-statutory basis, and work with young people and victims. In the absence of qualified SPO equivalents, strategic work such as sitting on safeguarding boards, criminal justice councils and developing policies and procedures also falls to probation officers. Both services share several challenges owing to their remote location - most notably professional isolation and living and working in small communities far from home. One of the ways staff in both islands have sought to overcome this is through 'dotted line' supervision with colleagues in HMPPS, and more recently with peer support arrangements.

Laura and Nicola began to meet online two years ago, before planning to attend the 5th World Congress alongside Fiona where the three met in person for the first time. This was following a precedent set in 2019, when St Helena Probation Service was represented at the World Congress for the first time by Fiona in Sydney, Australia. Enabling individuals practicing in these unique circumstances to draw support from others within the context of a conference like the World Congress, has strengthened the working relationships between the South Atlantic Ocean's two Probation Services and provided vital learning and networking opportunities which are not commonly available to probation officer grade staff.

At the World Congress, Laura and Fiona presented an academic poster which explored the positive impact of a community service partnership between St Helena Probation Service and the St Helena National Trust during their time working

together as practitioners on St Helena. This received considerable interest from professionals, practitioners, and researchers who visited the stand over the three days: an invaluable networking opportunity. Throughout the conference there were opportunities to explore probation practice with professionals from around the world; from Japan and their impressive Volunteer Probation Officers to the 200-year-old Dutch Probation Service. Visiting Kingston Penitentiary - one of Canada's oldest prisons-turned-museum - as well as a tour of working prison Joyceville Institution, which boasts an open estate with tree lined streets, was a chance to hear how Canadian correctional services continue to learn and improve their practice. Another highlight was the opportunity to observe a Parole Board of Canada hearing and spending time at a Q&A with parole board members afterwards.

Of particular relevance were sessions where the value of international policy transfer and exchange was explored both by Iuliana Elena Carbutaru, Vice-President of the Confederation of European Probation (CEP) in the context of developing probation services in Romania. Similarly, Stephen Pitts and Leo Tigges presented 'Building Service & Community Capacity: Learning from International Experience' which strongly resonated with many of the experiences of those responsible for developing probation in the South Atlantic over the last decade. Other useful workshops explored areas such as youth justice and victims, supporting areas of practice that are within the remit of probation officers on St Helena and the Falkland Islands.

The conference spanned Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on the 30th September which seeks to recognise the ongoing impact of Canada's residential school system on indigenous communities. Several presentations focussed on Canada's First Nation, Inuit and Métis people. One example of this was a session on the justice system's 'Gladue Principles' which aim to take specific account of the experiences of indigenous communities in Canada in a specialist pre-sentence report. In a time where the decolonisation of institutions is an essential consideration for all, this emphasised the importance of valuing culturally informed practice. Ensuring that practice is drawn from a wide range of evidence bases, regardless of geographical location is a vital element of practice across the BOTs given the diverse make-up of communities across the territories.

The conference provided a platform for those that share similar professional values and are striving to do better in a world where everyone is short on time to connect. These experiences helped to solidify a commitment of support not just for the South Atlantic islands, but to other Overseas Territories and developing remote or rural probation services. The opportunity to connect with likeminded professionals and share learning and development is something that as a group of professionals, we are determined to take forward. As such we have founded the Community Justice Overseas Territories network (CJOT) and aim to continue to build and grow a strong professional network supporting others practicing in similar contexts, with knowledge exchange and peer support at the heart of the network. The network's connection to Sheffield Hallam University's *Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice* - home to numerous research active academics in probation, in

addition to being one of just four providers of the England and Wales probation officer qualification degree - will enable the network to support opportunities for continuous professional development through academic input. We are planning a number of outputs, ensuring evidence-based practice is at the heart of our work. The network will also be a space to showcase the excellent work that already takes place in these lesser-known probation services.

Returning from the conference in October 2022, CJOT met to draft and review an initial Terms of Reference whilst also undertaking several other pieces of planning and peer review activities. The network's next steps will be to arrange its membership both with professionals in the British Overseas Territories and elsewhere. We hope to write to Probation Quarterly with an update of our membership, it's activities and planned works before October 2023 when further events are planned to mark the 10th anniversaries of both St Helena Probation Service and the Falkland Islands Probation Service.

If you would like to find out more about the Community Justice Overseas Territories network, please get in touch by email on:

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