

Is the day of a probation officer in Germany similar to the one of someone working in Romania? In the series 'A day in the life of a probation officer', we publish articles written by probation officers from different countries in Europe to see if their days look alike or are very different from each other. This article is written by Kerstin Jöricke a probation officer from Lower Saxony, Germany.



As soon as people find out what kind of work I do, they either say "how exciting" - more from young people - or "pshaw, that's definitely not an easy job" or "I wouldn't want to do that job" - more from older people and also well-off people. The job as a probation officer is both exciting and challenging, but at the same time exhausting and demanding. Since 2007, I have been pursuing this job in the federal state of Lower Saxony with its ups and downs, beautiful and sad moments, successes and failures, gratitude and ingratitude. A job as colourful as a chameleon.

My working day usually starts at 8:15 AM in the office. The computer starts up, the answering machine is listened to, the mail is sifted through and the emails are checked. At 9:00 AM I usually start meeting clients. These can be orders in the context of probation as well as in the context of court assistance. On busy days, there are eight personal contacts with clients if they keep the appointments. The content of the interviews varies depending on the type of order, the course of probation, the conditions and directives as well as the clients' need for help.

Before the interviews, I prepare myself by studying the files in case of first contacts or by looking at what the topics were in the last interview, what agreements were made and where we are in the course of care - deadline for the case analysis and reporting deadlines to the principal. During the conversation, there may be brief interventions that require calls to or accompaniment to cooperation partners, or clients may need help in drafting or forwarding letters. An intervention plan is drawn up together with the client.

Methodologically, I mainly use motivational interviewing, active listening, network map, questionnaire on alcohol consumption, and offence analysis. Referral to other cooperation partners is essential for specific issues. If desired and after professional consideration, accompaniment to these cooperation partners may take place. After the interviews, the content of the interview is documented in our computer application, either by writing it down or by dictating it. The systemic case analysis is carried out or supplemented. If deadlines permit and a report deadline or report request exists, such a report is prepared promptly. It also happens that further telephone calls with cooperation partners or drafting of letters are necessary after the talks.

At 10:00 AM we have a breakfast break with our colleagues. Every Tuesday there is a team meeting where new cases are distributed and important things are discussed. At 12:30 PM we enjoy our lunch break on the terrace of our office or go out to eat. The afternoon continues as the beginning of the morning. Appointments with clients do not only take place in the office, but also in the form of home visits or walks, which have gained popularity through Corona. During the walks, it is noticeable that the clients are more talkative than in the office.

Mondays and Thursdays are usually trial days at our local district court, where we are personally present when clients are retried and report on the progress of their probation. There is good cooperation with the judges, so that professional questions and client-related concerns can be discussed through the short official channels. The working day ends at 07:00 P.M. on long days, as clients with work can often only attend appointments in the evening hours. The short days sometimes end at 04:00 or 05:00 PM.

Besides client work, I also have other tasks:

- contact person for colleagues working with extremist clients
- deputy quality representative

These tasks include service meetings, case meetings, cooperation meetings, meetings with colleagues on topics related to quality work and offering a training module - but not on a weekly basis.

I am grateful to have colleagues with whom I can exchange views on difficult cases directly or in the course of collegial consultations on a monthly basis. In addition, I use the offer of supervision to stay balanced and reflect on my work. As a probation officer, I am only human and therefore also make mistakes or reach my limits. But as my supervisor said so well, clients are not just a number to me, but persons with their very own sensations, feelings, perceptions, expectations and wishes, which often lead to a very dynamic course of conversation. It takes a very long thread of patience and an eye for the right moment at the right time when I, as a probation officer, can be there and make a difference. But I also draw strength from seeing that clients have managed their way back into life without reoffending. If this is also reinforced by good cooperation, then I know what I am doing this job for!

A statement on "This is how justice is done" from the book Shantaram by Gregory David Roberts made a lasting impression on me and should always be in the back of the minds of all those working in this field:

"Justice means a judgement that is fair and conciliatory. And justice only happens when everyone is satisfied, including those who have wronged us and must be punished by us. What we have done with these two boys shows you that justice does not only consist in punishing those who have done wrong. It also consists in trying to save them."

Let's see what the next day has in store.