

The work during Covid-19 in a French open environment prison

Laurène Boulineau has been a penitentiary counselor for integration and probation in an open environment prison in Paris since 2016. Originally from Vendée, she appreciates the Parisian life with its many cultural and other assets. As for the Seine St Denis department where she now works – despite the difficulties that it concentrates, it also represents a challenge. “We learn to work with the means at hand”, she says.

Different types of probationers

She has about 75 probationers in follow-up. “This is a very diverse audience, with very different profiles, ages and personal situations – but that is what it makes interesting. The inhabitants of this department however, one of the most precarious in France, also have many other problems like social, administrative, economical and health ones”.

With the business continuity plan that has been set up for the Covid-19 pandemic, Laurène is mainly teleworking. Since the start of confinement, she has provided 3 one-day hotlines at SPIP 93. “We call outgoing detainees, most of them about the health context, as well as outgoing visitors, and we deal with emergencies, particularly in terms of electronic bracelets.”

Teleworking

For teleworking, she had to retrieve every probationer’s telephone number in order to ensure continuity of service, to maintain the contact and to write the necessary reports. “We have deadlines to meet, for example for measurement purposes. In addition, in a context of confinement conducive to violence and isolation, we maintain a social bond with the people placed under the care of justice for whom we are responsible, especially in cases of sensitive files and vulnerable people. It is sometimes necessary to ensure the continuity of therapeutic follow-up or even to carry out an emergency referral to a care-giver or an integration association concerning the homeless, in conjunction with the psychologist and the social worker of SPIP and our different partners, also in teleworking”.

Lack of equipment

Everything is done by professional phone or via personal devices as she does not have a professional laptop, no access to emails or APPI business software; which makes continuity of service very precarious. “I spend a lot of time calling on-call colleagues for physical or digital records of contact details or information about a person’s situation”, Laurène says, “For phone conversations or to write reports. Even though teleworking is a very interesting tool and proves to be necessary in this period of health crisis, the lack of equipment has serious disadvantages. And also it will never replace the core of our job, which is the interview with the person placed under the care of justice.”

Difficult

“Being of a friendly nature and an open personality”, she concludes “I find it easy to keep in touch with colleagues and friends, but I think that for more ‘closed’ people this long house arrest can be really difficult.”