

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 Marilyn Attard, a dedicated probation officer from Malta.



There is never a dull moment in a day of a Probation Officer, it is a job where time flies and days go by without noticing and days become weeks, weeks become months and months become years. In 14 years of being a Probation Officer I can honestly say that there was never a repetitive day. I have experienced challenging moments, lived dreadful moments and taken some harsh decisions and this is always in the name of love for my clients. As they say sometimes you need to be cruel to be kind and oh my! sometimes I have to take a stand in order to save the life of a person and perhaps of potential victims. My standpoint is I'd rather see you in prison than visit you at the cemetery! I will leave no stone unturned until I'm sure that the risk for the person is minimized as much as possible. Such decisions have to be sustained in court and evidence needs to be solid in order to achieve a safer plan for the client. Nevertheless, patience is vital.

Most days start by sitting at my desk switching on the PC, switching on the lamp, pouring a cup of black coffee, taking a comfortable position and look at the diary to see what I have, as I call it: "on today's menu". Unless the day begins with a client who arrived before I did I start carrying sessions at 6:30 a.m., yes I really quench for coffee but duty first. One task after another, one report after another, a court sitting, case conference, visits whatever is planned or not planned.....bring it on!!

But what keeps me there, doing this for years on end? There is no prospect for career advancement, a number of times people don't understand what I do because I don't have a job everyone can understand: a doctor, a lawyer or architect, no I am a probation officer and proud. I work with the marginalized, those people who for one reason or another came in contact with the criminal Justice System and the Judiciary decided that the input of a Probation Officer may be necessary. Every story has its own journey, never straight forward but a plan is necessary even though this changes a million times. I beg my clients to help me help them, I cannot do this on my own but I need them on board to be successful. Sometimes success is not as what we expect it to be, sometimes we need to tone down our expectations and enjoy little progress and accept some regress too but we keep moving forward hoping for the best. This provides an opportunity to build a wonderful relationship with the client even though the client sometimes finds it difficult to understand that I want what is best for him/her and I do understand that they often have to fight a lot of demons in their head to be able to follow what I recommend.

The work of a probation officer goes beyond the client too because the client cannot be taken in isolation a client is part of society and often part of a family. Therefore, interventions and

regular contact with family members are also of utmost importance. I only get to see the client for a very short time while the family spends their life with them, so who else if not a mother, a wife, a daughter, a father or brother, they can provide valuable information that can help me understand the situation better. They also often require my support and my help so I spend a long time listening, listening, and listening to what they are going through – the pain, the sorrow, the fear and I try to support them as best as I can. The worst part with the family is when they lose someone or a family member is seriously injured, any negative experience; you need to live the moment with them, almost cry with them.

Finally, although I talk a lot about what I do in reality it is not I but Us. I often collaborate with a team of professionals each addressing a different issue. Their work is priceless and the collaboration is indispensable – social workers, drug rehabilitation program staff, mental health professionals, prison staff, youth workers and the list goes on. On behalf of the clients and myself I am so grateful for their collaboration, this is certainly not a one-man job, the rehabilitation and reintegration process of a person can be very complex and it brings on a whole spectrum of difficulties. Nevertheless, I can also be very demanding with these professionals as I need to record their interventions too therefore I often call and send emails requesting information. On top of their workload they have to put up with my regular requests for feedback, especially when a court sitting is approaching.

The work colleagues deserve a whole new paragraph. Yes, some of them put on my nerves, yes we don't always see eye to eye, yes there are personal agendas in the office that often cause tension, but I have gained so much more. I gained a family! Then there is that one person or two who makes the job more special because they are not just colleagues but they are the persons I can trust, my friends they are the pillars you can rely on in those difficult moments when I feel like giving up. These very few special people are the people who ground me. They are also the people who I can enjoy some extracurricular activities with them which also strengthens the bond.

So, the work of a Probation Officer, the day of a Probation officer is indeed dynamic. It all starts from a client but it brings with it emotions and experiences where hope is what keeps us going. Probation work is not any job it is a vocation. The prize is the smile on their faces, a happy mother, or after years they remain grateful and they understand that whatever decision you made, you made it in the name of love for the client. It is also the special friendship you build with those few colleagues.