



## **5<sup>th</sup> CEP expert meeting on Technology in Probation:**

### ***The challenges and possibilities of digital probation and remote supervision***

**17<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

#### ***Report***

Mrs. Pia Andersson, chair of the CEP expert group on Technology in Probation, welcomed everyone and expressed her gratitude to the two presenters of the meeting, Jane Dominey and Julia Audick, for their presence and willingness to contribute. She also mentioned the second key point of the meeting: to start thinking about drafting possible “golden rules” for (the use of) technology in probation, in order to later further elaborate on these during another meeting in autumn.

CEP Secretary General Willem van der Brugge added to this explaining the concept of CEP expert groups and the fact that sometimes its activities and outcomes could be very interesting and important to bring to a larger audience via workshops or other events.

Then Pia gave the floor to the first presenter, *Ms. Jane Dominey*, and asked her to shortly introduce herself.

Jane thanked Pia and said that she was a researcher at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom, with a background in probation and training. In the summer of 2020 she had been conducting a small piece of research (together with the Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC) concerning remote supervision – the research that she would be presenting today at the CEP expert meeting.

Jane started by describing the outline of the research (“*what did we do?*”) and then told the group about their experiences with (the use of) technology. She said that before the pandemic there was little or no use of remote supervision but that this had changed quickly because of Covid-19. Devices were updated and adjusted, although in the first period there were still quite a few security issues and concerns regarding privacy matters. Jane mentioned the three themes that she wanted to address during her presentation: ‘*sense & supervision*’; ‘*relationships & remote supervision*’; and ‘*looking to the future*’. For all of these Jane presented the group some quotes from practitioners about how they had experienced this new phase and the way of working coming with it. Despite the fact that it was often hard to really connect with people without seeing each other face to face, there were surely also benefits. For example it had been very interesting to find out that some clients were much more open on the phone than they had ever been at physical meetings. It remained however difficult to work remotely with



clients having complex problems like mental health issues. Jane said that at the moment they were developing new ways of adding interest and variety to the remote programs, like apps/specific online programs/a library containing relevant information.

After and during the research, the research team had been evaluating the learning points from the pandemic – most of all the aspects that would be useful to keep in post-pandemic times as well.

Pia Andersson thanked Jane again for her presentation and said that the active questions & discussion part would take place after the second presenter from the Baden-Württemberg Probation Service, Ms Julia Audick.

Julia took the floor and thanked Pia for her words and for the invitation to present. She said that for 3 years now she was working in the central administration in the department of Research & Training – she was responsible for the development of social diagnostic programs.

She recognized Jane's situation of in the beginning of the pandemic – no sufficient smartphones available and a lack of knowledge regarding online tools. The survey that she had been conducting consisted of the evaluation of electronic client evaluation (51 files) and a questionnaire. The main issues/questions were: who had made the first contact, the probation officer or the client? (result: in 65% of the cases the probation officer) ; Had agreements been made with the clients? (result: yes in 82% of the cases) ; which topics were discussed during the phone calls? (result: mostly the probation conditions, the personal and financial situation) ; Did the telephone contact meet the need/wish for care? (result: yes in 75% of the cases) ; Was the case ongoing or in an initial case? (result: initial in 20% of the cases). The last aspect was important as it made a big difference if the probation officer had already met the client in person or if the first contact was made online.

Julia said that an interesting thing to notice was that clients were more open during telephone conversations than they had been in face-to-face meetings. Also during the telephone contacts topics were raised that had not been addressed in previous personal meetings.

Julia shared several quotes of probation workers who gave feedback on their experiences with the online way of working with clients. Based on these she said that for the Probation Service in Baden-Württemberg the conclusion could be made that telephone consultation and/or consultation by video could be a serious option for suitable cases in future. However of course many things were still unknown and also it was not certain how the situation would develop during the coming months. Surely one of the important aspects would be the organization of trainings in online working for probation officers.

Pia thanked Julia for her presentation and then opened the floor for the questions and discussion session.

Imants Jurevicius (Latvia) first came up with a remark and said that in Latvia there were still issues and doubts about distance working for probation staff. He said that face-to-face meetings were considered very important as otherwise one would lose the part of body language that could add a lot to the spoken words. He was however pleasantly surprised to hear in the two presentations that on the phone the offenders were even more open! He said that these researches were really timely and that he would very much like to share them with his colleagues to inform them about these different experiences.

Gail McGreevy (Northern Ireland) indicated that also in her jurisdiction the experience was shared that offenders spoke more openly on the phone than when being in a probation office. She asked the group



if perhaps there was a difference between men and women in this regard? And in cases where child care was involved it might work differently as this was always a very delicate subject.

Willem van der Brugge (CEP Secretary General) asked a question to both presenters. He wanted to know if in some way the sector of probation was afraid of using new technology as in fact many other sectors already used online ways of working..?

Julia answered that in her jurisdiction this was indeed an issue. She said that it might have to do with the initial training of these officers – they were told that the core of their work consisted of meeting people face to face. She added however that she herself did not agree to that as it always depended on the person and the specific problems of the client. Hybrid solutions could be a very good option as well.

Jane came back to Gail's question regarding the gender issue. She said that in their research they had made a distinction between many different groups (men/women/young offenders etcetera) but that not many deviations came out. The interviews did make more clear than the surveys but the problem was also that probation officers did not always know if the woman answering questions at home was safe and felt free to speak.

David Raho (United Kingdom) said that in his country they were going towards a one and single Probation Service towards the end of June. He had just been provided with a completely new tech kit: phone, laptop, access to Teams and whatsapp. He indicated that this was very good and promising, but that always the main thing was to try and do what is best for both the client and the probation officer. For that reason the dialogue should be made to find the right ways of working and the correct solutions.

Pia reacted by saying that perhaps during a next meeting in autumn the group could give more reflections on this, also from the service user's point of view? Training in working digitally was surely an important issue, but who could provide this?

She indicated that it was very important to identify the different situations/circumstances: when would it be more appropriate to use technology, and when would face-to-face meetings be better? Everything depended on the digital skills of the probation officer, the environment and the aspects of data security.

Willem said that he had heard of the advantage that when doing online contact (via phone or video) the family could be involved – people that would otherwise stay out of sight but could be helpful for the process. Julia answered that she had heard of this but that it was not the case for Baden-Württemberg. Pia however indicated that in Finland they were indeed doing this – involving the family and/or other relevant people.

Then Pia then said that unfortunately (because of the time) she had to wrap up and come to an end of this meeting. She expressed her idea for the coming period: to start thinking about golden rules/guidelines for remote (or hybrid) supervision, leading to (when such a document would be there) organize a webinar or conference on the topic? Willem agreed that this could be a very good plan for the year 2022.

Pia then thanked everyone for his/her presence and said that she looked forward to meeting again in autumn for a next meeting.

