

Is the day of a probation officer in Romania similar to the one of someone working in Malta? 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 by Odelsie Vella Bayliss, a probation officer with the Department of Probation and Parole in Malta.



I am a woman; I am a wife; I am a mother; I am a probation officer. Whilst most people fully comprehend my three initial roles, they somehow give me a weird look when I talk about my job. “So, you get to work with them – the criminals.... Are you not scared?” they ask.

How my day commences.....

I wake up at five o’clock in the morning. I prepare everything for the kids, including lunches and uniforms, so that my husband will be able to get them ready and drive them to school. Yes, this task lies in my husband’s hands because I walk into the office at 6.30 am. One may ask why I choose to commence work at such an ungodly hour. The reason is that I choose to accommodate a good percentage of my

working clients with an early appointment to avoid them having to use their vacation leave to attend their appointments with their probation officer. As much as these sessions are important, so are their vacation leave and free time, in my opinion.

Preparing a large cup of black unsweetened coffee, taking a good look at my diary, and switching on my computer, are the first three tasks of my working day. I usually plan my day hour by hour. Do I stick to that plan? Not always!

On occasions, it may be an unplanned court hearing or field visit that disrupts my day plan, on other days it may be an emergency with a client or a telephone conversation/session that exceeds the planned timeframe, whilst on other days it may simply be a report or a situation where I feel stuck. Despite having been working as a probation officer for over eleven years, I still encounter those circumstances where I feel trapped and fail to know what course of action to take. These are the moments where I resort to the help and opinions of the office superheroes – my colleagues and my seniors. Genuine information sharing is what shines the most amongst our team of probation officers.

No morning is the same – some mornings are filled with sessions with clients and urine testing, whereas other mornings take me to court, meetings with other professionals or field visits.

“So, what do you speak to clients about”? people often ask me. “The list is endless” I reply.

The list truly is never-ending because no session is the same. As a probation officer, I often compare myself to a sweet and sour cocktail; a mixture of jobs combined – a fine category

that falls somewhere between social work, counseling, police work and advocacy, amongst others. I converse, discuss and listen to offender clients and their difficulties, I keep contact with their family members, I refer them to any help required, I see that they adhere to the conditions of their supervision order and report them to court in the lack of this, I speak highly of them in my reports and in my testimonies before the court when they show satisfactory progress, I help them to the best of my abilities and confront them when their behavior is unsatisfactory and I do my best to motivate them to choose the right path in life.

I have always been taught that probation work is about caring for and controlling the offender, in order to ultimately reach the end target – the protection of society.

Emotions.....

These run all over the place when you are a probation officer and daily deal with people from all walks of life, who have their own baggage to carry, alongside their individuality. No day is the same!

As hard as I try to keep my emotions in check, I must admit that there were instances where I did let my emotions get the best of me. I quietly shed tears when I felt that I have failed as a probation officer after having lost a client to an overdose or suicide. There were moments that got me fumed up and angry when a client behaved inadequately, whilst on other occasions I cried with my clients and carried their heartache. On a number of occasions, I admit to having endured what was beautifully termed as ‘therapy hangovers’ (Kate Bratskeir, 2019) following a session with clients that was emotionally draining, even though I was not on the receiving end of the session.

Whilst I always keep in mind that as a probation officer, I should thrive to keep my emotions under control, I take comfort in knowing that having such feelings do not only make me human, but also reassure me that I truly care about my work, my clients, and their well-being. If not, why would I feel angry about a client who chooses to take the wrong path again? Why would I feel my heartbreak in the face of another client’s rough situation?

Afternoons.....

As I mentioned at the beginning of this write-up, I am a mother to six-year-old Elyse and three-year-old Emma. One may think that being a probation officer deprives a person from maintaining a balance between work and family, yet this is not entirely true. Thankfully, I have benefitted from workplace family-friendly measures, where I am able to work both remotely from home and on a reduced-hour schedule.

1 pm is the time when I leave the office, pick up my kids from school and head home. My typical working afternoon usually consists of paperwork, seeing to emails, report writing, updating files, attending online meetings and returning phone calls – really and truly any type of work that can be remotely carried out.

Ending Notes.....

I understand that, as a probation officer, I may not be liked by everyone. One I came across an excellent online quote on QuotesGram that beautifully describes this – “Probation officer...If I wanted to be liked I would’ve been a firefighter”.

A person that is not motivated to change is most likely to perceive the probation officer as an obstacle. I personally hold on to the following quotation, which I downloaded from a website called me.me and taped to the top of my computer screen – “How many probation officers does it take to change a lightbulb? One, but the lightbulb has to want to change”.

I deem my job as a probation officer valuable. I see myself as contributing to society and that feeling is highly rewarding. Witnessing a positive, successful change in a client, fills me with pride and happiness. The diversity in the job itself makes it a thrilling one. I perceive probation work as not just a job but a continuous learning and growing experience. Yet, I must admit that there are times when this work physically and mentally exhausts me, hence I make it a point to not only care about my clients and society in general, but to also care for myself and my well-being, because how can I effectively help others if my spirit is broken? I do this by taking time off from work and going on mini vacations, engaging in activities that I enjoy and that help me relax, asking for help whenever I need it, spending quality time with my children and giving attention to my health and the way I look, amongst others.