

Funding helps Orange Co. expand its probation staff

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PAOLI — The Orange County Probation Department is one of 34 probation departments that received a grant from the Indiana Department of Correction.

The grant is for \$62,500 and was awarded in July. Dee Pedigo, chief probation officer, said the grant was awarded as part of a collaboration with Hoosier Hills PACT. Pedigo said grants were available for community corrections programs, probation departments, prosecutors' diversion programs and court recidivism reduction programs. A total of 129 grant applications were submitted.

"The grant is a blessing for the department," Pedigo said in a press release.

The applications were reviewed by the Indiana Department of Correction and the Justice Reinvestment Advisory Council.

Pedigo said the funds will be used to hire a new probation officer (a position filled by Jeff Holland) and training. The grant could not be used to supplement or pay for existing positions within the probation department. The majority of the department's budget is funded by probation user fees.

Pedigo said about 300 adults and juveniles are in the Orange County probation program. The increasing caseload trend worries those who manage probation programs, even some who supported sentencing reforms that are aimed at diverting people and money away from prisons and into community-based treatment and corrections programs.

According to Pedigo, since taking effect a year ago, sentencing reform is ratcheting demand for probation services faster than it sends people into local jails or assigns them to spots in community corrections programs. She said a study by the Indiana Judicial Center found that two-thirds of the lowest-level felony offenders are being put on probation, compared to 60 percent before the law went into effect.

The focus of the grant was to provide funding for serving moderate- and high-risk felony offenders in alternative sentencing placement and to provide evidence-based services and supervision in a collaborative manner. The Orange County Probation Department has been referring clients to Hoosier Hills PACT, which offers evidence-based programs such as Thinking for a Change, Moving on, Decision Points, Prime for Life and Prime Solutions.

Hoosier Hills PACT also offers Day Reporting for offenders who are referred by the Orange Circuit Court and probation department. The Community Transition Program is a joint effort between the probation department and Hoosier Hills PACT. The program is for the offenders who are eligible for early release and are transitioning back into the community. Both agencies provide supervision for the offenders. The probation department also refers clients to Southern Hills Mental Health Center, Centerstone, Orange County FACT and Substance Abuse, Gateway Ministries, Churches Embracing Offenders and other providers. Probationers are monitored with the Odyssey Case Management System, which enables probation officers to track their clients and effectively manage their cases. "We have several goals in the probation department," Pedigo said. "Community safety is always top priority. Probationers and pre-trial release clients abiding by court orders, and the well-being of our clients is always on our mind."

Holland's work focusing on offenders with felonies

PAOLI — Jeff Holland has been hired as a new probation officer in Orange County. The position was made possible through a \$62,500 grant awarded to the Orange County Probation Department from the Indiana Department of Correction.

Holland, a Paoli native, was chosen by Orange Circuit Court Judge Larry Blanton to fill the position.

Holland graduated from Paoli High School in 1982 and served in the United States Army from 1982-92 and was in Desert Storm. Holland is a 1990 graduate of Indiana University Southeast.

Holland is required to take the state's probation certification test within six months of being hired. Upon passing the exam, his certification will be valid as long as he remains an officer or five years. Holland also is obligated to be certified in Indiana risk assessment and Indiana youth assessment, which is a detailed course the state provides for new probation officers. Upon passing the required state tests, a probation officer has the ability to assess the needs and risks of clients, which provides an increased awareness in the preparation of an offender's case plan.

Holland is trained in the Odyssey case management system, which the probation department utilizes for tracking offenders. Holland also is undergoing training for the Incite System (Indiana Court Information Technology Extranet) online system. The internet-based system is for the preparation of the adult pre-sentence reports and juvenile reports.

The probation department has undergone a change in the home incarceration field this year and has partnered with Total Court Services based out of Royal Oak, Mich., in offering new monitoring equipment. Holland is being trained in using the equipment. The probation department also has collaborated with Witham Toxicology Laboratory in Lebanon for expanded drug testing options, such as hair, in addition to the oral and urine methods. Random drug and alcohol testing is a mandatory term with the clients placed on probation and under pre-trial supervision.

Holland's caseload will focus on medium- and high-risk felony offenders in the county. He will be continuously monitoring and assessing probationers, and also will be supervising pre-trial defendants pending court proceedings. Others on the probation department staff include Dee Pedigo, chief probation officer, and Morgan McDonald, adult and juvenile probation officer.

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