

Executive Summary

The Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security encourages the engagement of volunteers in probation services. It is expected, that volunteers can contribute in a meaningful way to the re-integration and re-socialisation of probation clients. The Dutch Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles also has recently so advised. By engaging volunteers in the probation process, the community is involved in the criminal justice process, and it is assumed that this will help to reduce re-offending rates. In addition, it is expected that the involvement of community members in the sanctioning of criminals will increase general trust in the justice services.

The research aims and question

At the moment, the three Dutch probation organisations are involving volunteers only in a limited number of services (in a volunteer visit program for Dutch prisoners in foreign countries, in Circles of Support and Accountability, and a small number of volunteers are engaged in befriending programmes). In the course of a government funded innovation programme, a number of pilot volunteer projects have recently been set up by probation services. However, more knowledge on volunteer management in probation services is needed, to inform an overarching policy that includes goals, strategies for the organisation of volunteer involvement, and models for volunteer programs and for the cooperation between volunteers and paid staff. Probation services in other countries work with diverse models of volunteer engagement and management, which could provide valuable examples for the Dutch probation services. This study has explored examples in Ireland, England, Sweden, Austria and Japan.

Three questions guided the research:

1. How is volunteer involvement in the probation services organised; what are the conditions that need to be in place, what are volunteer tasks, and how does the work of the volunteers relate to the tasks of paid staff?
2. What are the effective mechanisms of volunteer management, including recruitment and assessment, training and retention, cooperation with paid staff, and what is the outcome of volunteer engagement?
3. Are the examples of the organisation of volunteer engagement and of volunteer management meaningful for implementation in the Dutch context?

Method

The research has been carried out as a series of five case studies, which describe the context of probation services, current practices of volunteer management, and their outcome. The comparison of cases revealed underlying mechanisms in the combination of context, practices and outcome. A concise international review of empirical research into outcome of volunteer services for probationers was conducted. Finally, we evaluated if the examples in the countries that were studied could be meaningful for the Dutch probation service. First, we held them up against the Dutch legal context and national policies, and second, we assessed the support for the examples in two group sessions with stakeholders from government departments, probation services, third sector organisations and with academics.

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The organisation of volunteer engagement

The research in the five countries revealed three models for the organisation of volunteer engagement, yet none proved to be without flaws.

Three models for the organisation of volunteer engagement:

1. Commissioning
2. Procurement
3. Employment

In Ireland, the probation services have no volunteers within their organisation. Here the probation service commissions volunteer programmes (commissioning model). The probation service is involved in the development and monitoring of volunteer programmes, which are run by third sector organizations. Programs are funded by the probation services. In England, we found a model in which third sector organisations are contracted by the probation services to provide volunteer programmes (procurement model). In Sweden, Austria and Japan, the probation services themselves employ volunteers (employer model).

The probation services (in our study) who engage volunteers through commissioning or procurement are organisations with a strong focus on risk management. They have no or just a few volunteers within their own organisation. Volunteers are 'hired' through third sector organisations with the aim of improving the service delivery to offenders, e.g. by providing additional social support.

The probation services who work with the employer model all have a long tradition of volunteer engagement. In fact, in these countries professionalized (and paid) probation services have been largely absent until the second half of the 20th century. Only recently these probation services have introduced professional standards and methods, and risk management systems. In their view on probation they express a clear focus on social inclusion of the offender. Volunteer engagement is seen as a key strategy in their service delivery, as a means to bridge the gap between justice systems and the community, and also as a way to reduce the costs for probation services.

Models of cooperation

The tasks which volunteers are entrusted with, can be classified as core probation tasks (e.g. tasks that are legally the responsibility of probation services, e.g. supervision of conditional release) and additional tasks (tasks which support the probation services, e.g. social support). The models of cooperation between volunteers and paid staff reflect the division of tasks and responsibilities.

Three models of cooperation:

1. Professional responsibility
2. Shared responsibility
3. Volunteer responsibility

In Ireland and England, volunteers provide services in a ‘professional responsibility model’: professionals in probation services fulfil core probation tasks and volunteers provide mainly additional services. In Austria and Japan, volunteers provide services in a ‘shared responsibility model’: volunteers are co-workers. Both volunteers and paid staff provide core probation services and are responsible for their clients. Volunteers, however, have a lower caseload and do not work with high risk clients. In Sweden, the model of cooperation is currently changing from shared responsibility to professional responsibility, as a result of the introduction of professional standards and methods. In Austria, professional standards also have been introduced a couple of years ago, and here the volunteers are trained to work according to these standards. In Japan, public prevention programs are also core probation tasks, and these programs are designed and provided only by probation volunteers, therefore a third model was identified as the ‘volunteer responsibility’.

Working conditions for volunteers are similar in most countries, with regard to legal status, volunteer agreements, liability insurance and expenses. There are two exceptions: firstly, in Austria volunteers are seen as fully responsible probation workers, equal to paid staff, but with a lower and less complex caseload. Their legal position and salary however is different to that of paid staff. They are paid a lump sum of expenses per client, which is considerably higher than volunteer expenses in other countries. Secondly, in Japan, volunteers have a legal status as unpaid government officials.

In all countries the terms of employment for volunteers are laid down in a volunteer agreement (which is not legally binding). Volunteer agreements differ in the level of expectations and obligations for volunteers. They are least demanding in Sweden and most onerous in Austria and Japan.

What are the effective mechanisms of volunteer management, including recruitment and assessment, training and retention, volunteer contributions and cooperation with paid staff, and what is the outcome of volunteer engagement?

Effective mechanisms of volunteer recruitment, training and retention balance volunteer tasks and systems of volunteer management with the needs and interests of volunteers. Successful examples are listed below.

Table 1: effective mechanisms of volunteer recruitment and retention

	Practice	Mechanism
Recruitment and assessment	VO ¹ : Recruitment by local volunteer coordinator PO ² : recruitment by regional management/local worker	Local network; local volunteer workforce is recruited
	Written policies on recruitment and selection	Quality assurance
	Recruitment through diverse media: social media, newspaper, website	Meeting diverse search strategies of volunteers
	Personal recruitment (by role models from diverse backgrounds)	Diverse group of volunteers; meeting needs of probation clients from diverse backgrounds
	Attractive and interesting tasks	Meeting diverse motivations and interests of volunteers; less investment in recruitment necessary
	Recruitment of experts by experience; ex-	Unique expertise, less investment in recruitment

¹ Volunteer organisation
² Probation organisation

	offenders	
	Strict selection criteria	Volunteer gets status and recognition; increased moral binding
	Less strict selection criteria for ex-offenders	Increased opportunities to train basic work skills and build cv.
Training and support	Mandatory basic training	Quality assurance; increase of knowledge about probation services
	Job-specific training	Professional skills; more responsible tasks
	Training on different levels for volunteers with different training needs	Meeting diverse needs for personal development, increased self-efficacy
	Supervision	Quality assurance; increased commitment to organisational goals and values
	Group supervision; peer supervision	Quality assurance, peer learning; social support
Retention	Diversity of tasks: long term commitment and short term commitment	Meeting life course dependent needs and motivations; increased availability
	Symbolic rewards, e.g. recognition, personal support, acknowledgement of contribution;	Increased willingness; balancing contribution and rewarding
	Offer diverse facultative training opportunities	Meeting competency needs, personal growth
	Offer formal position and status	Meet status needs, acknowledge shared values, increased commitment
	Support in personal issues	Social support; support personal growth, meet competency needs; increased commitment;

Effective mechanisms regarding volunteer contributions and cooperation with paid staff

In most examples, volunteers are providing individual supportive services to probation clients through befriending schemes or mentoring and peer mentoring programmes. In peer mentoring programmes, probation clients are being supported by ex-clients, who have successfully completed their term of supervision. In some countries volunteers are also involved in restorative justice interventions such as conferencing, mediation and victim panels. In England, some probation organisations hire the services of User Voice, an organisation of experts by experience, who perform action research and service user panels with the aim of improving services. Probation services in Austria and Japan employ volunteers as unpaid probation officers. In Austria, these volunteer probation officers perform all responsibilities, including reports for the court.

Table 2: Effective mechanisms in volunteer contributions and cooperation

	Practice	Mechanism
Type of contribution	Long term support (befriending, mentoring, peer-mentoring, COSA)	Informal social contact and social control; support access to institutions; working at personal goals
	Long term support for family (e.g. parents, partner)	Empowerment of social network
	Short term support (e.g. helpdesk, consultation)	Support access to institutions; informal social contact; first aid in times of crises
	Restorative justice (e.g. restorative conferencing, mediation)	Community and victims are involved in sanctioning process
	Participative action research and service user panel	Empowerment; service improvement
	Unpaid probation officer	Community is involved in sanctioning process; Some cost reduction for probation organisation
Criteria for target group	Risk and problems (low risk; no current drug abuse, no psychiatric disorders)	Prevention of overburdening of volunteers Prevention of recidivism in peer mentor; Quality assurance
	Offence (no sex offenders)	Prevention of overburdening of volunteers; Prevention of negative community attitudes

	Relationship with probation client (not family members)	Prevention of role confusion
	Gender (same sex mentor mentee couples)	Prevention of (sexual) transgression of boundaries
Cooperation with probation officer	No direct contact	Prevention of role confusion, clear position of volunteer 'outside the system'
	Cooperation in goal setting (together with probation client) and evaluation	Goal oriented support; increased effectivity
	Supervision by professional	Quality assurance
	Volunteer writes reports	Quality assurance; accountability
	Work with standardized method, mandatory training	Professional standards; quality assurance Increased effectivity

The choice of target groups that volunteers can work with is usually based on the principle: 'no harm' (for volunteers).

In all countries, volunteers are supervised by paid staff of the organisation they are working for. In most cases, they are obliged to report periodically to their supervisor about their contact with the probationer. Volunteers who are employed by the probation service usually must report to their supervisor on any signs of risk or violations of license conditions of the probation client with whom they work. Volunteers who are employed by third sector organisations will have to report any degree of risk if minors are involved. In most countries, agreements between volunteer, probation client and supervisor about what is to be reported and what needs not be passed on are made at the start of the mentoring or befriending programme.

The cooperation between volunteers and paid staff can become stressed, when the probation clients that volunteers are working with have complex problems, and volunteers cannot produce the intended outcome. Also, the cooperation can suffer from tensions when volunteers are expected to meet professional standards, which do not align with the way they see their role.

Outcome of volunteer involvement

Most organisations expect that volunteer services will produce a positive outcome for probationers in terms of re-socialization and re-integration. Theoretically, these expectations are based on contemporary criminological models like the Risk/Needs/Responsivity model, desistance theory, or theories on empowerment. However, the expectations about the outcome of volunteer engagement are rarely empirically tested and researched.

A concise international review of empirical studies on volunteer involvement in probation services has shown that in many programmes goals and methods are not clearly defined, which compromises the programme evaluation.

Positive outcome:

1. Mentor programs
2. Peer mentor programs
3. Restorative justice interventions (not for drug related offenders)
4. COSA

Mentoring schemes appear to have a positive effect on the re-integration of probationers, depending on the quality of programme implementation. Peer mentoring has a positive effect on both peer-mentor and mentee, depending on the quality of selection and coaching of the mentor. Volunteers in restorative justice projects for juvenile offenders can contribute to the reduction of recidivism, but no effect was found when dealing with drug-related crimes. Involving volunteers in restorative justice projects also improves the engagement of local communities in the probation services and sanctioning of criminals. Volunteers in COSA projects contribute to the reduction of sexual and general recidivism of sex offenders, and has COSA been proven cost-effective in the United States.

Are the examples of the organisation of volunteer engagement and of volunteer management meaningful for implementation in the Dutch context?

We have considered examples meaningful if they are feasible given the Dutch context of rules and regulations and supported by Dutch stakeholders.

meaningful = feasible & support

Feasibility

According to Dutch law on volunteering, all models of organisation of volunteer involvement are feasible, as well as all models of cooperation between volunteers and paid staff. For volunteers who receive unemployment benefits however there are restrictions on the amount of expenses and on the kind of work they are allowed to do.

The Dutch Probation law allows the engagement of volunteers for probation tasks through commissioning, procurement and employment. The probation law however excludes a cooperation model in which paid staff and volunteers have shared responsibilities with regards to core probation tasks, and in which volunteers hold a full responsibility. Therefore, the Austrian and Japanese model are not feasible at this moment.

As examples in other countries show, the Dutch probation services could engage volunteers for a wide variety of tasks, and this could improve their service delivery in a meaningful way. The engagement of volunteers who are experts by experience would be especially innovative, since this is not as yet common practice.

Support

Dutch stakeholders are very supportive of engaging volunteers with the aim of improving probation services and bridging the gap between society and the probation function. Reducing probation costs, however, should not be an explicit goal according to most stakeholders, since this is not why volunteers offer their services. However, reduced cost was acknowledged by some as a possible outcome. Stakeholders underscored the value of volunteer services in order to complement probation services, yet core probation tasks like supervision of conditional release was not seen as a task for volunteers, except if probation services engage volunteers through the employer model in such a role. While signalling risks of recidivism was not seen as a responsibility for volunteers, highlighting other risks that need immediate reaction (e.g. suicide, child abuse etc.) was. According to stakeholders, volunteers could work with all kinds of offenders, given their own safety should not be at risk and volunteers could be offered proper training and support.

Table 3: Meaningful forms of volunteer engagement

	Meaningful for implementation on short notice (feasible & support)
Goals	Improve service delivery Bridge the gap between probation and the community
Organisational model	Procurement Employment
Role and model of cooperation	Additional tasks (all models of cooperation) Core probation tasks (professional responsibility)
Conditions	Volunteer agreement Liability insurance Expenses Criminal antecedents check Privacy agreement
Type of contribution	Long term individual support (e.g. mentoring) Short term support (e.g. practical support) COSA Experts by experience as co-trainers for staff
Target groups	Probation clients with support needs Probation clients who do not present any risk for volunteers
Cooperation with professional	Supervision by professionals Agreement on tasks and roles Report only health and security risks, not violation of licence conditions

There is not yet much support for innovative forms of volunteer engagement. Therefore building support should be given much attention during the implementation of new initiatives.

A strategy for implementation

According to recent implementation theory, innovative methods will be accepted more easily if they fit the attitudes and subjective norms of stakeholders. The implementation of new volunteer programs will be more successful when the Dutch probation services hold a view on probation in which the importance of social inclusion of offenders is clearly expressed. They need to make clear choices with regard to goals and organising models of volunteer engagement and should devise a diversity of volunteer tasks aligned with volunteer motivations. For high quality implementation they need to develop a strategy which is based on what is known about effective implementation of innovative programs, as well as a communication strategy to build support for the innovation.

Strategy for implementation:

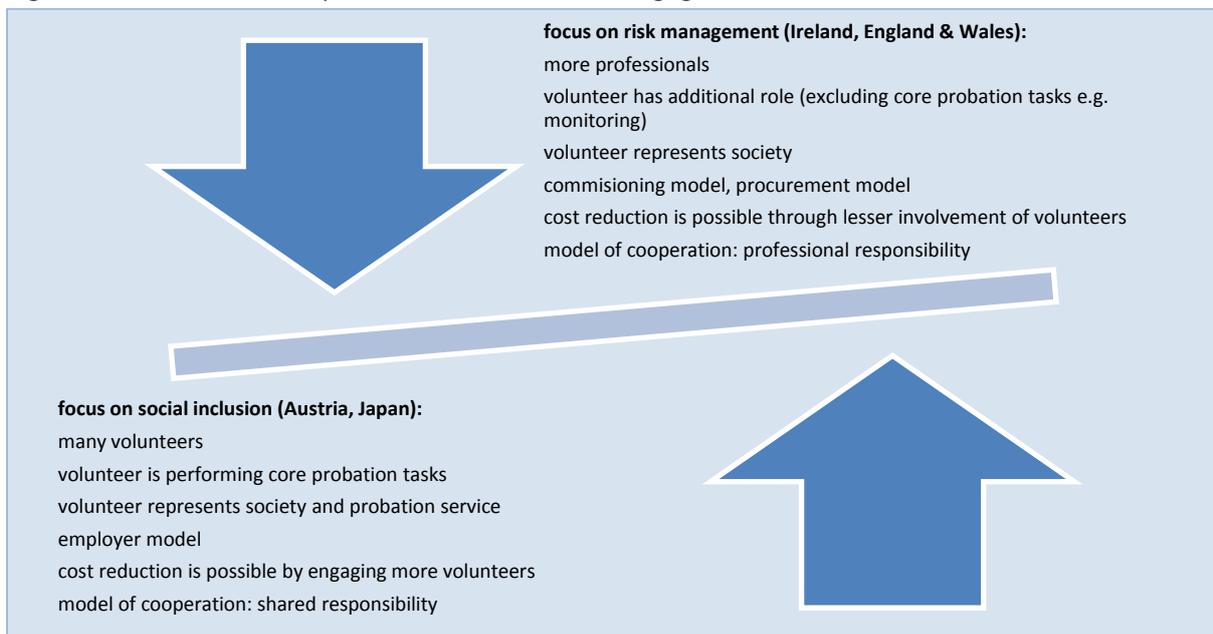
1. View on probation: include focus on social inclusion
2. Explicit goals: service improvement and bridging gap with society
3. Organisational model that fits with goals (procurement or employment)
4. Engage volunteers for additional tasks
5. Model of cooperation that fits with organisational model
6. Organisational model and volunteer contributions must meet clients preferences
7. Increase internal support: develop an implementation plan and communication strategy.
8. In procurement model: develop a shared strategic plan for cooperation
9. In employment model: install regional volunteer coordinators for recruitment and selection
10. In employment model: leave matching and volunteer coaching with probation officer
11. Scientific evaluation of the implementation process and result

Conclusions

The *first research question* addressed the engagement of volunteers in probation services on an organisation policy level.

During the course of this research, we found that the variations in volunteer engagement in probation services can be understood as a function of their view on probation. Views differed in their focus on risk management versus social inclusion.

Figure 1: Focus in view on probation and volunteer engagement



Sweden's is an in-between position in this model. In the past years, the view of the Swedish probation organisation has shifted from a focus on social inclusion to a focus on risk reduction. In the course of the investment on professionalization, the number of volunteers dropped sharply from 4500 a few years ago to 1000 currently. Both commissioning and procurement result in an interdependency of probation services and third sector organisations. Cooperation on a policy level and on a worker level is essential to produce the intended outcome.

The *second research question* addressed the mechanisms of effective volunteer engagement and their outcomes.

The results showed that the recruitment of volunteers is more successful if volunteer motivations and needs are matched by the type of tasks and the working conditions and support they get. Absence of volunteer policies and lack of support can lead to a substantial loss of volunteer workforce as the example of Sweden shows. When volunteers are expected to meet professional standards, this can lead to tensions in the cooperation with paid probation staff. When volunteers are involved in services for probation clients through Third sector organisations, there needs to be a good level of trust and mutual understanding of each other's work and role. International studies into the outcome of volunteer programs for probation clients show that well implemented volunteer

(peer) mentor programs can contribute significantly to the re-settlement of offenders. A direct effect on recidivism has been proven with methodological rigour for Circles of Support and Accountability ; a volunteer program for the re-integration of medium to high risk sex offenders.

Figure 2: Balancing organisational offers and volunteer needs



The *third research question* tapped into the meaning of the examples for the Dutch probation services.

Volunteers can enrich the organisation; experts by experiences can offer unique qualities. Implementation needs to be built on shared views and needs to address conflicting interests.

While many models of volunteer involvement are feasible, not all were deemed desirable by Dutch stakeholders. Therefore, not all feasible volunteer policies are promising and fit for implementation. Whether probation organisations choose to employ volunteers themselves or 'hire' volunteer services through other organisations, it is necessary to develop a common ground of values and goals, both on a policy level as well as on a worker level. Both sides fear to be pushed out of the market, and this could seriously hinder mutual cooperation. Volunteers are a flexible workforce; they can enrich the probation service with their specific knowledge and expertise. Experts by experience can make a unique contribution.

In order to implement innovative and feasible volunteer programs, much attention needs to be given to the development of positive attitudes. In the procurement model as well as in the employment model, shared views and values need to be developed on both a policy level as well as on a worker level. Both sides can fear to be pushed out of the market, and this can hinder the cooperation of volunteers and probation officers.

Limitations and future directions

This study explored the practices of volunteer engagement in probation services in five countries. It mainly reflects the experiences of managers and paid staff, since only a few volunteers have been interviewed. Their experiences are included through a review of the literature. Due to the breadth of the research questions and the time constrictions concessions had to be made to the depth of analysis. Only major patterns in volunteer engagement are described here. In addition, the question on how to implement useful examples in the Netherlands, could only be answered to a limited extent, since the necessary groundwork needs to be done first. We were not able to provide information about the cost of implementation. Future research on the chosen models should provide information about level of goal attainment, outcome and costs. Furthermore, future research should test the presumed relationship between the focus in the view on probation and the engagement of volunteers.

Volunteers can serve as flexible bridge builders for probation clients and probation services if their employment is built on a foundation of an overarching view on probation, on volunteer policies and integrated in the organisation infrastructure and culture.