

Supporting Others through Volunteer Action

SOVA/Herts Project

## **Annual Report**

Period Covered: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 – 31<sup>st</sup> March  
2010

Author: Sharon Ahmad

# **CONTENTS**

	Page
1. Introduction	3 - 4
2. Objectives and Targets	5
3. Volunteers	6 - 9
4. Service Users	10 - 11
5. Project Development	12 - 13
6. Objectives and Targets for next year	14
7. Conclusion	15
8. Appendices	16 - 25

## **INTRODUCTION**

The SOVA/Herts Partnership project has been active in the County for the last 12 years.

The Project is based in St Albans and has various funding Partners, the primary partner being the Hertfordshire Probation Service.

The volunteers are recruited from all over Hertfordshire and work within the four Probation Centres in the County as well as in the community. The project recruits, trains, places and supports volunteers in this work.

They take part in a wide range of tasks which compliment and enhance the work of the Offender Managers and other partners' staff. Referrals are made to us directly from our partners.

The Project has expanded over the years and its success is credited to a consistent, enthusiastic and ever expanding volunteer group, a dedicated and hard-working team and being responsive to changes in the Probation Service and with our other funders.

The aim of the project is to assist with the rehabilitation of offenders and substance misusers. Another important aim is to lessen the 'fear of crime' in the local community by involving members of the public in that rehabilitation.

In this target year, SOVA/Herts has had funding from the following agencies;

Hertfordshire Probation

Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Service (HAFLS - part of Hertfordshire County Council)

Choices and Consequences (C2 - a Hertfordshire based initiative working with the Police and Probation)

Drug Intervention Programme team (DIP)

Youth Offending Team (YOT)

In September of this fiscal year, SOVA/Herts won a new contract with

Herts County Council's Drug Team; the Through the Gate project. This project is headed by a Project Coordinator but overseen by the SOVA/Herts Project Manager.

All of our funding partners have different criterion, targets, expectations and demands but with the same core objective – to empower and try to rehabilitate service users by working with members of the public.

During 09/10, staffing comprised of;

Project manager (full time)  
2 Support Officers (full time)  
1 Administrator (part time)  
1 Project Coordinator for TTG (full time)

The size of the staff reflects the difficulties of meeting the demands from our various partners.

## **OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

The target from Hertfordshire Probation for this reporting year was 6248 volunteer hours.

We exceeded this target by 33% reaching a total of 8313.

The increase in hours for Probation is due to a combination of factors:

- Increased referrals
- Increase in demands and expectations for specialised volunteers in various areas of work. This has led to an increase in training opportunities for volunteers.
- An increase in structured support for volunteers (the number of who has also increased partly due to the current economic climate).

The increased workload has created extra pressures on staff and has had financial implications for the Project – income has remained the same but the expenditure has risen to meet these demands.

The target for HAFLS was 100 learners. We exceeded this by 20%, reaching a total of 120 learners. Our Quality of Provision Grade also increased from 3 to 2 ('Good' by OFSTED criterion). Other targets from HAFLS have been met including one member of staff obtaining the PTLLS qualification, Lesson Observation training and Management Information (MI) reporting has become secure and imbedded.

Targets for our smaller contracts have also been successfully met with the exception of C2. This is due to the chaotic nature of this client group, last minute cancellations, pressures on the Probation C2 team which has been reflected in a shortfall of referrals. SOVA staff are now attending some initial bail meetings which will hopefully generate more referrals.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

SOVA/Herts recruits its volunteers from various County-wide Volunteer Bureaux and Community Volunteer Services. We also have volunteers who have heard of the Project through friends/family, through their Offender Managers or Case Workers and through the Human Resources department at Probation (who signpost potential applicants to us). We have even had Administration staff from Probation join us as they have been impressed by the work of the volunteers and want to get involved!

Volunteers are sent information and application packs when requested. On receipt of a completed application form, we invite prospective volunteers for a first interview. If both staff and the prospective volunteer decide to proceed, they are then invited to attend the Core Training.

The training consists of 6 sessions which has had to increase by 1 session this year to include TTG training. This normally takes place 3 times a year but we had to deliver an extra daytime training session this year to cope with demand. On successful completion of the training, a second interview takes place and if both parties agree, the volunteer can then begin to work when their CRB has been received.

Some examples of Volunteer tasks are set out below:

**Skills for Life** (SfL) (literacy and/or numeracy) - either 1:1 or in a group lead by a tutor.

**Mentoring** – female and male in the community or in one of the four Probation Centres.

**Money Advice** – giving general advice on housing, benefits, debt and DLA forms either directly or supporting the service user by accompanying them to other organisations/agencies.

**Employment** – Volunteers also support in the Probation 'Job Clubs' which are held weekly in each of the Probation Centres. Volunteers support Service Users by helping them with job searches, writing disclosure letters, writing C.V.s, helping with their C.S.C.S. qualification (Health and Safety for building work) and driving theory. All of these tasks are also undertaken on a 1:1 basis for Service Users who cannot attend a job club.

**Victims of Domestic Abuse** – the Project also has referrals from the Victim Unit in Probation to mentor women whose partners are on the IDAP programme (Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme). The volunteers are required to undertake a 2 hour training session before they commence mentoring in this specialised area.

**Probation Programmes** – volunteers are used to support Service Users on the various Cognitive Behavioural Therapy programmes that they run.

Supervision is provided monthly to volunteers by a member of the SOVA team. This is recorded on a volunteer supervision database  
Volunteers are also supported by an open door policy.

This year, we have received 58 applications, trained 57 and accepted the same number.

***Please see appendix 1 for a breakdown of the diversity of our volunteers.***

The Sova/Herts Project continually runs short courses to update and enhance volunteer skills. This is to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. They are notified about up-coming training opportunities by a quarterly newsletter. We also invite volunteers to conferences if applicable; 5 volunteers attended a Domestic Violence conference in February this year.

The range and frequency of Volunteer courses held this year are listed below:

Core Training X 4  
Women Offenders' Toolkit Training X 3  
Victims of Domestic Abuse X 2  
Drug Intervention Programme x 2  
Through the Gate x 1  
Introduction to Benefit Advice x 2  
Introduction to Debt Advice x 1  
Aspergers Awareness x 1  
Specific Learning Difficulties awareness x 1  
Adult Learning Support (City & Guilds Level 2) x 1

All of these training courses are delivered by either SOVA staff or by the relevant expert. A SOVA member of staff is always required to facilitate the courses if they are not delivered directly by SOVA.

Hertfordshire Probation has had a freeze on recruitment but recently advertised for the first time in eighteen months. Some of our volunteers applied and three were successful; one is a Probation Support Officer, one a Programme Tutor and one a Supervisor for the Community Payback scheme.

Other volunteers have also gone onto new employment. Some examples of the other areas are: Support Worker for the Prince's Trust, Project worker for Open Door, Support Officer for Stoneham Housing and Support Worker for the YMCA. This is a good reflection of SOVA/Herts recruitment procedures.

We are thanked by these employers for the high level of training we give the volunteers as they make such good employees!

Volunteers approach SOVA/Herts for a variety of reasons:

- To provide support to Service Users experiencing similar things to themselves.
- To give back to society
- To gain experience for employment opportunities
- To learn new skills
- To make decisions over changes in careers

The extracts below are from a Volunteer/ Learner Satisfaction Survey on our Core Training that we now undertake once a term for HAFLS:

“Did the course meet your expectations? If not, why not?” The results were as follows:

Met expectations	75%
Exceeded	25%
Declined to comment	0%
Did not meet expectations	0%

Listed below is a sample of comments from Volunteer learners:

***“Yes it did. Good basic introduction with additional training to follow.”***

***“Exceeded expectations. Completely changed my way of thinking.”***

***“Exceeded my expectations. Found every session so interesting. Also enjoyed meeting my colleagues on the course.”***

***“It is without doubt one of the nicest, friendliest, informative training courses I have attended. The training is all about talking to and not talking at which stops boredom and increases absorption of training. V. well done.”***

The extracts below are from volunteers on their experiences:

***“Thank you very much for the excellent training I received and the team’s support which I thought was great and a credit to SOVA”.***

***“A big thank you for all your help and support during my time with SOVA. It has been a wonderful experience and that’s due to the hard work you guys put in!”*** (SOVA volunteer leaving to start new employment in Hertfordshire Probation)

***“This is what I joined to do – really make a difference! It’s so rewarding to see how X has improved and her self esteem grown!”***

## **SERVICE USERS**

Service Users are referred by our partners by telephone, e-mail or in-person when SOVA staff are networking within the 4 Probation offices. We take details of the Service User such as; gender, age, aspect of support required, availability and location. All service users have been risk assessed before mentoring commences.

We then search our volunteer database and 'match' a prospective volunteer with the Service User. The volunteer will then contact the Offender Manager or Support Worker and a '3-way' meeting is arranged. This meeting will be attended by the volunteer, Service User and the Offender Manager/Support Worker. The mentoring then commences.

During the 2009/10 period, we have received 1317 referrals. All these have been accepted. Referrals can be ongoing for a long period of time whilst others may be short-lived.

A breakdown of the Service Users data is not permissible due to Probation's data protection rules.

The Project carried out a Service User survey this year and a summary of the results are below:

***Please see appendix 2 for full report.***

### Offender Survey results:

34% of the surveys were returned all of which were positive. The following data was collated from the information received in the surveys:

<b>Area of Support</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
Skills for Life	13%
Employment Skills	22%
Mentoring	44%
Money Advice	22%

It must be stated that the majority of the respondents had received help in two or three different areas.

Quotes from the Service Users on the forms include;

***“Very helpful and listened to my problems. Helped me with CV and applications for jobs.”***

***“Good to talk to someone. Should give him a job!”***

***“Found her (the volunteer) absolutely brilliant. She was a very good listener. To be honest I’ve been on Probation on and off since I was 16 and am now 45. She has been more helpful and understanding than most of them.”***

Hertfordshire Probation also carried out an independent survey of Service Users regarding the SOVA provision. Some quotes from this are as follows:

***“It’s a lifeline for me and I would like to see my volunteer for about 6 months after the sentence ends to help me keep up my good progress.”***

***“I can be open with him (the volunteer), not emotionally attached therefore not judgmental.”***

***“He (the volunteer) made me think I had a right to be alive despite what I did.”***

Case studies are collected on a monthly basis, some examples of which can be found in **Appendix 3**.

The results of these surveys and case studies show the impact that the volunteers have on the Service Users’ lives.

## **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

The team at SOVA/Herts liaised with a number of agencies other than our Partner colleagues. These include personnel from the Hertfordshire Money Advice Unit, tutors from local colleges, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) specialists and Job Centre Plus staff.

The Through the Gate initiative has begun well with the Project Co-ordinator working extremely hard with colleagues from Turning Point and Hertfordshire Probation Trust to raise the profile of SOVA and the service Through the Gate can provide.

***Please see appendix 4 for the Project Co-ordinator's Summary Report.***

An Offender Manager Survey was undertaken this year and a summary of the result is as follows:

### Offender Manager Survey results:

SOVA provision met expectations?

80% All met  
17% most met  
3% some met

Partnership liaison?

66% excellent  
26% good  
6% satisfactory

Some quotes from these surveys are demonstrated below:

***“Thank you for your continued hard work. It is appreciated by us all here. You make our jobs a bit easier.”***

***“Excellent service consistently with SOVA”.***

***“I always feel SOVA are quick to respond to referrals and do excellent work with offenders – thanks!”***

***Please see appendix 5 for the full report.***

Please see below comments from Doug Hook, Partnership and Commissioning Manager at Hertfordshire Probation Trust:

***“A big thank you to the volunteers from Hertfordshire Probation Trust. The volunteers make a huge difference to individual lives. The SOVA/Probation relationship is superb partnership working”.***

In January, SOVA staff and volunteers participated in the Hertfordshire Probation Inspection. They were interviewed by OFSTED regarding Education Training and Employment (ETE) provision. The report stated that SOVA/Herts is ‘a strength’ within the Hertfordshire Probation Trust.

Please see an extract from the report below:

***“Over 80 Supporting Others through Volunteer Action trained volunteers provided good individual support for offenders. They used a wide range of skills and experience to provide the offenders with support across a broad range of ETE related activities, including lessons and job club activities. They also worked effectively with offenders who were foundation tier learners and who needed support with their literacy and numeracy.”***

SOVA staff attended the Hertfordshire Probation Staff Awards Ceremony with one of our volunteers who received an award for his work within the Choices and Consequences initiative.

The SOVA Project Manager and a volunteer were interviewed by Radio Verulam, the local radio station in St Albans. This was to promote the work of SOVA helping to reduce offenders’ criminal behaviour, supporting offenders and thereby, integrating them back into society, therefore contributing to a safer community.

## **OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS FOR PERIOD 2010/2011**

The Hertfordshire Probation Trust's contract is due to finish September 2010. Originally, the date was for the end of this financial year but due to unforeseen circumstances, the tendering process has been delayed.

SOVA/Herts are confident that with our exemplary previous history of service, we stand a good chance of securing further funding. However, nothing is certain in the current financial climate.

New developments for 2010/11 period include discussions with the Women's Centres in Hertfordshire to act as a 'bridge' between Probation and themselves to support women offenders.

This initiative has been developed to respond to areas of concern highlighted in the Corston Report.

SOVA/Herts has also been invited to join an Education, Training and Employment strategy group within Probation which includes other agencies. Initial meetings have taken place and this is an exciting opportunity to help develop the provision of ETE.

SOVA/Herts has also been invited to attend a Volunteer Workshop by the Bishop of St Albans in order to raise our profile and promote our work. This new contact was instigated by the Chief Probation Officer of Hertfordshire who is extremely supportive of the Project.

## **CONCLUSION**

The period 2009/10 has been an exciting, challenging and an exhausting one!

We have had some staff changes and said goodbye to Carol Hudson, our part time Support Officer. We welcomed Cathy Sanderson as part time Administrative Assistant and Paul Harte as TTG Project Co-ordinator both of whom have made a positive impact on the team.

At the time of writing this report, Anne Regan, SOVA/Herts' Project Manager of nine years has taken early retirement. We would like to take the opportunity of thanking Anne for her sterling work of raising the profile of SOVA within Hertfordshire. Sharon Ahmad has been promoted to Temporary Project Manager until funding issues are resolved.

Sadly, due to a lack of funding, the DIP contract has not been renewed, even though we are receiving more referrals which is due to the Through the Gate Project! We will be seeking supplementary funding to enable us to continue this work.

As already seen by our statistics, we have been incredibly busy. The demands from our funders increased weekly and we met them and sometimes surpassed them! As demands have increased on us, we have had to increase demands upon our volunteers.

We feel continually honoured, amazed and humbled by the work of our volunteers; the skills they bring with them, their empathy, enthusiasm and the impact that they have on so many service users.

Long may it continue!

## Appendix 1

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form 1 April 2009 - 31 March 2010							
<b>1. Gender</b>				<b>7. Criminal convictions</b>			
Male	16	Female	56	Yes	16	No	56
<b>2. Age</b>				<b>8. Ethnic Origin</b>			
18-25	17	46-55	9	<b>White</b>			
26-35	20	56-65	6	British (Welsh/Eng/Scottish/N.Irish)			53
36-45	20	66 and over	0	Irish			1
				Other White background			1
<b>3. Religion</b>				<b>Mixed</b>			
Baha'i	0	Jewish	1	White & black Carribean			2
Buddist	1	Muslim	2	White & Black African			0
Christian	39	Parsi	0	White & Asian			1
Hindu	0	Rastafarian	0	Other mixed background			1
Other	3	Sikh	0				
		Prefer not to	26	<b>Asian or Asian British</b>			
				Indian			0
				Pakistani			1
				Bangladeshi			0
<b>4. Sexual Orientation</b>				Any other black background			
Heterosexual	44	Lesbian	0				
Gay	0	Bisexual	0	<b>Black or Black British</b>			
Prefer not to say	28			Caribbean			7
				African			3
<b>5. Employment Status</b>				Any other black background			
							0
Full-time employed			14	<b>Chinese</b>			
Part-time employed			9	Chinese			0
Registered unemployed			16	Any other			0
Unregistered unemployed			0				
Houseperson/carer			9	<b>Declined to say</b>			2
Retired			5				
Self employed			9				
Student			10				
<b>6. Disability</b>							
Yes	3	No	67				
Prefer not to say	2						

## **Appendix 2**

### **Report**

To: Doug Hook

From: Anne Regan

Date: 8th October 2009

Subject: Offender Survey

#### **Introduction**

This report was commissioned by the Probation Service in partnership with SOVA Herts, to ascertain the effectiveness of SOVA's partnership with Probation and whether it was fulfilling a need.

Four areas were looked into, these were: Basic skills; Employment skills; Mentoring and Money advice.

Fifty surveys were sent to offenders, who were chosen at random from the four probation centres within Hertfordshire. The findings of the survey are as follows.

#### **Findings**

34% of the surveys were returned of which 100% were positive.

65% of the returned surveys included a complimentary comment. This wasn't asked for and was given voluntarily; most had also chosen not to remain anonymous, although this was an option.

Out of the 34% of respondents, 13% had received help with Basic Skills. 22% help with Employment skills, 43% were given one to one Mentoring and 22% were given Money advice (please see addendum). It must also be stated that the majority of the respondents had received help in two or three different areas.

#### **Conclusions**

The response was greater than expected, with positive comments being received. All four main areas were covered and the general response was that offenders found SOVA to be helpful and made them feel as if they had somebody to listen to them and to help with their problems.

## **Appendix 3a**

### Case Study for JD

When I first met JD he had already completed ten hour- long sessions with another volunteer, Isaac, who was moving away. JD was almost completely illiterate when he met Isaac, he could read singular capital letters but was not able to recognise lower case letters and could not read even simple two-letter words.

JD and Isaac had made good progress before I took over, Isaac had managed to teach JD most of the lower case letters and he was reading some basic two and three letter words. JD and I initially started to build on this, using two letter words as a starting point and then adding on a variety of letters to build up longer and more complicated words, e.g. it - hit, sit, bit, wit etc. JD responded well to this and the more he could read the more his confidence grew.

Our next step was to move on to what we called 'joining words', e.g. the, as, and, that. I printed a list of the most popular short words in the English language and we started to learn them one by one, moving towards joining sentences together. We found these more difficult as I could not use picture examples to help JD.

Once JD felt more confident with these, we moved onto double letter words with oo, ee, ll etc. JD seemed to respond very well to these, and picked them up very quickly. He seemed to be growing in confidence every week, and asked me to teach him how to read and write his children's names, which I thought was a very encouraging sign.

Our next step was to read short sentences such as 'Tom sat on the bus' which JD struggled with at first, he seemed to become nervous when faced with a string of words to memorise rather than just one. He quickly improved though, and towards the end of our time together I started putting together a file of increasingly difficult sentences, the hardest of which I have attached as an example.

I feel that JD really benefited from our time together, and spoke at some length about how he had been using his new reading skills in his everyday life, such as with road signs. At the end of our last session I gave JD a folder containing some learning aids to take home, so he could continue his studies, which he was keen to do.

E.F. Sova Volunteer  
August 2009

## Appendix 3b

29<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

### THE BRIEF FROM SOVA:

B has been sentenced for a year on probation and as part of her sentence she has to engage in a sixteen week course, 'The Women's Programme', to empower her. This sentence had been passed for driving four times over the legal limit at 9.15 am in the morning without holding a fully qualified driving licence.

B is a twenty nine year old woman who has a seven year old daughter, an alcohol addiction and is a single mother. There has been domestic violence with the father of her daughter during the relationship with him which continues two years after their separation; he does not contribute financially towards his child. B has debts and lives on benefits.

I first met B on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2009 and I have continued to mentor her on a weekly basis between one – one and a half hours each time. B does not tell anyone about her problems; she has "no good friends" left anymore, no sensible "sounding board" and has alienated herself from her family. B's mother engages well with probation, and myself, and is extremely concerned and worried about her daughter.

B was in a detoxification programme and also had problems with her spleen. She was admitted again to hospital for another two weeks for detoxification and was informed she has one year to live if she ever has another alcoholic drink, she has cirrhosis of the liver. I visited B in hospital she was pleased to see me and we spent over two hours together

B's relationships with men have a repetitive pattern of domestic violence. She has low self esteem and her relationships are volatile and self destructive. B's ex-partner, the father of her daughter, is violent and abusive to her and is a drug user. Her new boyfriend, a prolific heroine user on the methadone programme with a list of convictions, is also violent. The police have been at B's house a few times over the last few weeks and have now arrested the new boyfriend for failing to turn up in court.

B has turned up to probation with "a black eye" a couple of times, has been beaten physically and emotionally and has also been "locked in a cupboard under the stairs" by a man for a few days and fed sandwiches.

B, at times, has had no money for gas to put on her "key card" for her daughter to have hot water to wash and to cook her proper nutritional meal. B's personal hygiene is not always good and a lot of our morning meetings she has turned up "stinking of booze", shaking hands, the whites of her eyes are blood shot or yellow, her face is bloated as is her abdomen.

B's little girl, based on the information above gained over hours and hours of talking and breaking down her barriers, is now in care with her grandmother. This little girl is now safe; her school attendance has increased from 68% to 100% and social services monitor her very closely as well as her grandmother.

I like B and I give her my total support and dedication and a relationship has been built up between us over the last five months. B seems to trust and respect me as she does her probation officer.

The work that SOVA performs with their excellent training programmes is invaluable to the clients on probation, their children as well as society. The mentors gain the information for the probation officer who can use any relevant information alongside other agencies.

The support I have had from Barbra, Sharon and Ann is immeasurable as I normally telephone them every week for a "client up-date" due to this case being extremely stressful, up-setting and extreme. These ladies words of wisdom, guidance and reflection on the telephone are incredible as is their support. It is also a "light relief" to talk to them as they are all so "bouncy, witty, smiley and funny" and they "lift you out and up" of the situation you have just been presented with. They are fantastic.

I hope B will have healthy life and see her daughter grow up. I feel, as does the probation officer, that B's life expectancy may be short; we have four months left with B to work with her.

B's original offence has now become a "life line" to her and her daughter, I do not know where they would both be without B's conviction, the time, support and nurturing she has been given has enabled her daughter a chance of normality if not B herself.

CC SOVA volunteer

#### **Appendix 4**

The Hertfordshire 'Through The Gate' project began in December 2009 as part of the County Council 'Drugs System Change Pilot'.

The objectives of the project are to provide support to adult, Class A drug-using prisoners, who on release, will be returning to the County. A main driver being the reduction of the risk of re-offending or potential drug-overdose immediately following prison release.

Referrals are made from a number of bodies, including prison C.A.R.A.T.S. teams, drug workers, Probation and police.

The client is visited in prison by the S.O.V.A. Project Coordinator and the Prison Link Worker from Turning Point. The client must agree to drug-worker support to enable S.O.V.A. to also give volunteer support.

A Release Plan is produced and Probation in conjunction with the Police, conduct a full risk assessment of the individual. Clients are then matched with a suitable volunteer and can be met at the prison gate on release and given continued support for however long is deemed necessary by the drug worker.

Support given so far, includes assistance with Job Seeker Allowance, Crisis Loans, Community Care Grants, housing, re-training and general support and mentoring.

A total of 46 referrals were made to the project from Dec. '09 to Mar. '10. Of these referrals, currently 17 clients are being given in-prison support; 4 clients are receiving in-community support and a further 5 client cases have been successfully completed. (See Fig. 1)

#### **Chart Representing Client Cases for 2009-2010**

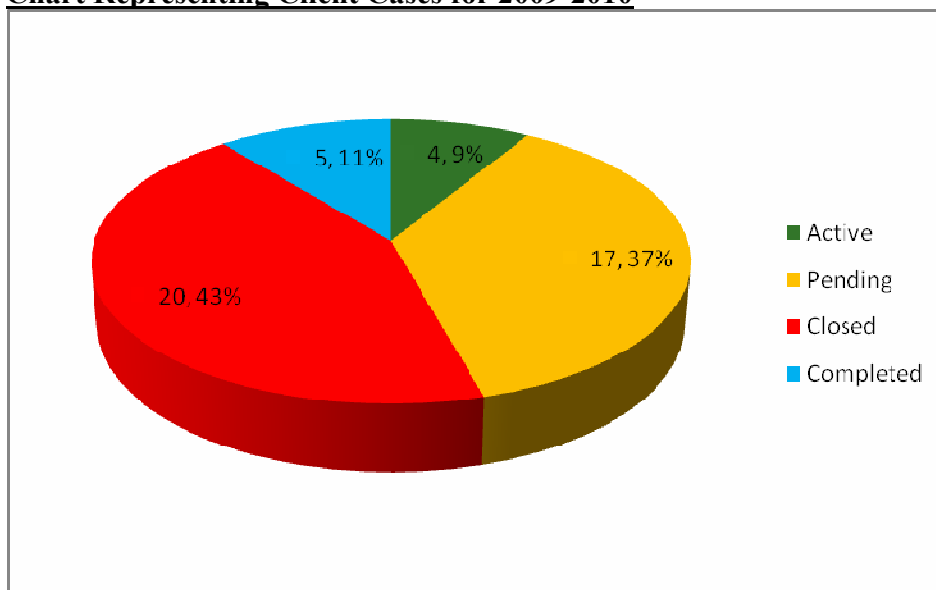


Fig 1

The objectives for 2010-2011, which have already begun, are to involve volunteers with the in-prison support of clients before they are released, thus giving a complete cycle of support from volunteers from the local community.

A further aim is to increase the number of referrals to the project as the purpose becomes more widely known. (See Fig. 2)

**Graph Representing Monthly Referrals**

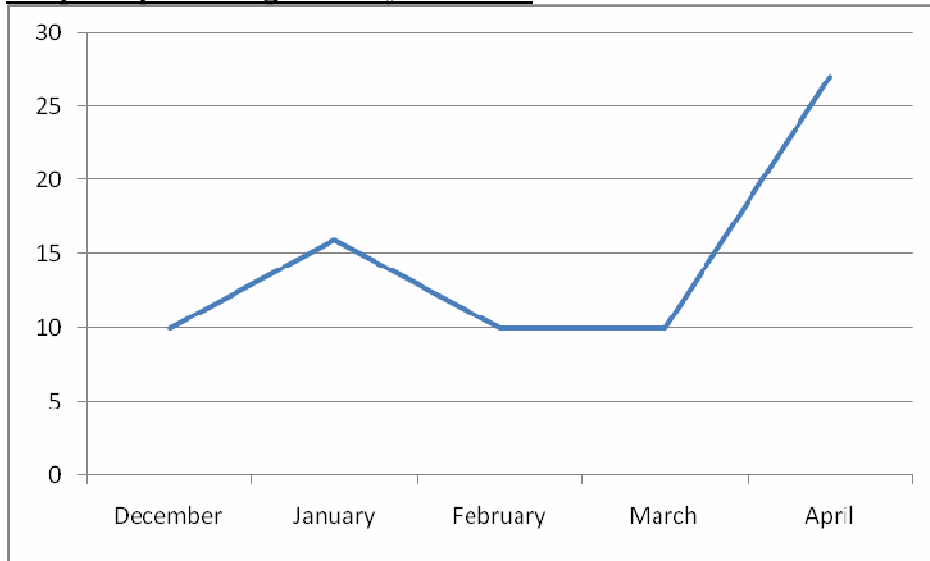


Fig. 2

## Appendix 5

### Report

To: Doug Hook

From: Anne Regan

Date: 15th April 2010

Subject: Offender Manager's Survey

### Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Probation Service in partnership with SOVA Hertfordshire, to ascertain the effectiveness of SOVA's partnership with the Probation service to see whether it was fulfilling their needs. In order to collate all the relevant data a survey was given out randomly to a number of Offender Managers within each of the four centres.

The first group of questions were aimed at finding out whether the Offender Manager had enough information about SOVA, whether their expectations were met and how they felt that the liaison between them and SOVA worked.

The second area was to establish, from the offender manager's point of view, how the offender had progressed since they began seeing a SOVA volunteer. Four categories were assessed, these were: Employment; Basic Skills; Self-esteem and Engagement.

### Findings

35 offender managers returned the survey out of the 50 which was sent out which was a return rate of 70%.

The first group of questions connected to SOVA's role. The results are as follows:-

In answer to **Question 1** which asked, "Have you been given enough information about SOVA?" The results were as follows:-

100% of those that were returned felt that they had enough information.

In answer to **Question 2** which asked, "How far did the SOVA support meet your expectations?" The results were as follows:-

All met:	80%
Most met:	17%

Some met: 3%  
None met: 0%

In answer to **Question 3** which asked, “How do you rate the liaison arrangements with SOVA?”  
The response was as follows:

Excellent: 66%  
Good: 26%  
Satisfactory: 6%  
Unsatisfactory: 2%

The next set of questions dealt with the offender’s progress in relation to four areas. **Question 4** asked how the offender’s progress was rated! The results were as follows:-

### **Employment**

Good: 40%  
Some: 36%  
Minimum: 24%

### **Basic Skills**

Good: 35%  
Some: 35%  
Minimum: 30%

### **Self-esteem**

Good: 74%  
Some: 23%  
Minimum: 3%

### **Engagement**

Good: 85%  
Some: 15%  
Minimum: 0%

**Question 5** asked, “If minimum in any category was this due to a factor(s) outside of SOVA’s remit? This was answered as follows:

Yes: 64%  
No: 36%

80% of the returned surveys included a complimentary comment. This wasn't asked for and was given voluntarily; most had also chosen not to remain anonymous, although this was an option. Some of the comments are as follows:-

“Excellent service consistently with SOVA”

I have rated Q1 & 2 negatively as the feedback from the volunteer being sporadic and attendance quite bad. I do know that when the meetings took place, the content was excellent and very beneficial”

“I always feel SOVA are quick to respond to referrals and do excellent work with offenders – Thanks!”

Out of the 35 responses, 72% were helped with employment issues, 27% were helped with Basic Skills, 89% felt that their client's self-esteem had risen, and 97% felt that the client's engagement had also improved. It must also be stated that the majority of the respondents had received help in more than one area and quite a 57% had been helped in all four areas.

## **Conclusions**

The response was reasonably good, with mostly positive comments being received. The negative comments, of which there were few, were mostly for things which were outside SOVA's control. It must also be recognised that SOVA will from time to time encounter volunteers who are not reliable, when this happens SOVA act quickly to resolve the situation.

The general response was that the offender managers found SOVA to be helpful & reliable and that their clients and they themselves had found it beneficial.