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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: Friday, November 22, 2024

OFFICE OF PROBATION AND PAROLE SERVICES ADDRESSING LONG-TERM GOALS



Senior Probation Officers Harmon Mason, Sheila Begishie and JoAnn Holyan-Terry recently joined Chief Probation Officer Lucinda Yellowhair (second from left) in a work session to revise the Office of Probation and Parole Services Standard Operating Procedures.

The Navajo Nation Probation Services team is accomplishing its goals in the Judicial Branch’s Strategic Plan by both working with outside resources and tapping into internal strengths.

Lucinda Yellowhair leads the Office of Probation and Parole Services within the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch as the Chief Probation Officer. She is assisted by three senior probation officers who are responsible for regional administrative functions and services in the eastern, central and western agencies. Probation officers provide community-based supervision for client-offenders at the local judicial districts.

One major goal that the Office of Probation and Parole Services accomplished recently is updating its training curriculum for staff and implementing a “train the trainer” model. With this

model, probation staff identify areas where they need training and provide the training to each other on an annual basis.

“It’s very effective, rather than being trained from another jurisdiction,” said Yellowhair. The trainings give new staff and veteran staff the opportunity to learn about policies and procedures that guide the Office, including interviewing techniques, risk assessment, data entry, appointment of legal counsel, and referrals.

An advantage of utilizing the “train the trainer” model is developing uniformity of practices across the Navajo Nation for the Office of Probation and Parole Services, Yellowhair said. The use of the model and development of uniformity address the first goal in the Judicial Branch’s Strategic Plan: “As the Navajo Nation court, peacemaking, and probation and parole system, we will ensure the continued provision of efficient, fair, and respectful judicial services.”

The probation officers have also been recertified in Moral Reconciliation Therapy, a cognitive-behavioral treatment program that may help to lower recidivism rates among offenders who receive such treatment. The treatment enhances moral reasoning, leading to better decision-making. The probation officers were first certified before the pandemic with plans to implement such therapy sessions with their clients. However, their certification expired during the pandemic. Now they are preparing to introduce Moral Reconciliation Therapy to Navajo Nation judges so that the judges will also be educated on the premise as a treatment option.

Moral Reconciliation Therapy is a tool for probation officers in achieving their mission of “advancing community wellness and the restoration of hozho by ensuring the rehabilitation of the client-offender in community-based supervisions...”

In addition to accomplishing training goals, the Office of Probation and Parole Services continues to work on revising its Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). SOPs are instructions to help carry out the day-to-day operations of an organization and can help an organization achieve efficiency and uniformity. A key aspect that is being incorporated into the SOP is officer safety, Yellowhair said. She noted that the office recently purchased defensive tactic gear and received training from federal partners on their use. The incorporation of officer safety into the SOP and the purchase of equipment also addresses the first goal of the Strategic Plan and the specific strategy of ensuring that probation and parole field offices have the equipment they need to maximize their functions.

Finally, the Office is in the process of hiring Presentence and Predisposition Investigators. These new positions will assist the courts by providing reports on background checks and social history prior to sentencing and/or disposition of a case. “There is a huge increase in pre-trial services,” said Yellowhair. “As a result, we are constantly growing and enhancing.”

The Office of Probation and Parole Services continues to work toward its overall goals and mission and is seeking applicants for positions within the office. Individuals interested in working for the Office of Probation and Parole Services or the Judicial Branch may find more information on job vacancies at <https://courts.navajo-nsn.gov/vacancies.htm>.

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