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|  | **Probation Department**  **Sierra County** |  |
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Probation life in a small county can be challenging. There are some obvious advantages to living in such a small county. Our total population is only 3400 (second smallest in the state) and we only have about 15 people on adult felony probation living in the county at any one time. The flip side of that coin is that it is often quite difficult to provide the specific counseling programs that are needed. For example, it is difficult to set up a domestic violence program when you may only have two probationers who fit that category. It is even more difficult with juveniles, when you only have six wards of the court. Although these factors make Sierra County a great place to live, it also makes providing services to clients a challenge.

That being said, what we do have is an excellent drug court program. The drug court team consists of probation, the district attorney, a defense attorney, drug counselors, child protection advocates, medical clinicians, and of course the presiding judge. The level of mutual cooperation is exemplary. Although we cannot hope to match some of the numbers of the bigger counties, the team has been quite successful at changing lives for the better, in our small corner of the universe.

I am a bit old fashioned in some areas, but I firmly believe that part of the reason for the recent success of the program is that the probation department is able and willing to make unscheduled home visits as part of the supervision aspect of the program. There is an old saying that a picture is worth a 1000 words. The same is true of home visits. Many probationers are very adept at telling their counselors what (they think) they want to hear, and making it appear that they are making real progress towards sobriety. It can be all too easy to fool a counselor or probation officer in an office type setting. However, an unscheduled home visit can be like going into a dark room and throwing open the curtains and turning on the lights. It throws the light of truth on the whole situation. And that is the key to make real positive changes in the lives of our probationers. Counseling and proper supervision go hand in hand and either one without the other will undoubtedly lead to disappointing results.

When different agencies co-operate, even when they normally have quite different agendas, positive change can be brought about in people’s lives. Even in a small, remote and easily overlooked corner of the universe.