

County of Hamilton

Probation Department

Court of Common Pleas
Municipal Court

The Mentally Retarded Offender

Project Status Report

1490

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U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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THE HAMILTON COUNTY MENTALLY RETARDED OFFENDER PROJECT
STATUS REPORT

I INTRODUCTION

- A. History
- B. Definition
- C. Philosophy

II PROGRAM OPERATION

- A. Referral procedure
- B. Staff
- C. Habilitation meetings
- D. Additional services

III PROFILE OF THE M.R.O.

(6/89 thru 5/90)

- A. IQ levels
- B. Age
- C. Gender
- D. Race
- E. Marital Status
- F. Residence
- G. Income
- H. Dual Diagnosis
- I. Court Referrals

IV RECOMMENDATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

A. HISTORY

In September of 1987 a committee was formed, consisting of representatives in the Mental Health and Mental Retardation fields, in response to several tragic incidences involving mentally ill/mentally retarded citizens and law enforcement agencies. The objectives of this committee, known as the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Probate Court Committee were to improve cooperation among the various disciplines and to develop programs that would coordinate services to these clients. One program created by this committee was the Mentally Retarded Offender Project.

Representatives from this group travelled to Cleveland, Ohio in August of 1988 to examine the Cuyahoga County MRO program. The result of this trip and the coordinating efforts by the Hamilton County Board of Mental Health, the Hamilton County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and the Hamilton County Probation Department, was the development of the Mentally Retarded Offender Project. At present, the MRO project is funded solely through the Probation Department.

B. DEFINITION

The AAMD - American Association on Mental Deficiency defines mental retardation as "significant subaverage intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period." The M.R. Offender is simply a mentally retarded individual who has been convicted of a criminal offense. This type of client is typically identified as a multi-problemed person who lacks resources and direction.

The MRO tend to involve himself in criminal activity due to low self esteem, lack of knowledge of alternative life styles, frustration and naiveté of the law and the consequences of committing a crime. He must learn to understand that he is responsible for his life choices and that he will be held accountable for misbehavior.

C. PHILOSOPHY

Our Probation Department's philosophy is that the M.R. Offender should be held accountable for his or her actions. The MRO project offers intensive supervision to insure public safety, to reinforce personal responsibility for crimes, and to provide access to available community resources. Criteria for eligibility are a full scale IQ score of 75 or below on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (Revised) and a demonstrated difficulty in daily living skills. The goal of the project is successful completion of probation and the utilization of available community support to prevent recidivism.

II. PROGRAM OPERATION

A. REFERRAL PROCEDURE

The M.R.O. project is staffed by two job-sharing probation officers who specialize in supervising the Mentally Retarded Offender. This year old project is unique as it receives referrals from both Common Pleas and Municipal Courts. The M.R.O. probation officers are resource brokers, counselors, client advocates, and court employees.

As previously stated, the project services those offenders with IQ score of 75 or below on the WAIS-R test. Testing is usually performed by the Court Psychiatric Center. If an IQ score is not available at the time of sentencing or probation referral, the M.R.O. officers review the case and make the determination as to acceptance into the project. The case is then referred for an accurate IQ score for program planning.

Once the offender is on probation, the officers review court stipulations, the psychological report, and the presentence investigation in order to identify and prioritize problem areas. The offender is referred to the appropriate agencies and the officer monitors his progress.

The M.R.O. has more adjustment problems with the criminal justice system because he does not fully understand the judicial process. He

cannot adequately assist in his defense and shows poor social judgement. The most significant aspect of this project is the amount of time that is allocated per offender to ensure that they fully comprehend the conditions of their probation. A reduced caseload size provides the extra time to assist the offender and increase the chances of successful completion of probation and adjustment to society. Simplified rules of probation, which have been approved by the Chief Probation Officer and the courts, have been developed by the probation officers as a useful tool with this population.

B. STAFF

Leslie Triplett Raasch

1971 Summit Country Day High School

1974 Miami University - B.A. Social Work

1978 Xavier University - M.S. Corrections

2/1975 to 5/1975 Activity Director Ridgeview Nursing Home

6/1975 to 9/1976 Vocational Evaluator, Goodwill Industries

10/1976 to Present

Probation Officer, Hamilton County Probation Department

6/89 - Mentally Retarded Offender Project, Probation Officer

Married with 2 children

Kathleen Ann Strouse

1972 Madeira High School

1975 Murray State University - B.S. Vocational Rehabilitation
Counseling

1984 Xavier University - M.S. Corrections

4/74 to 8/74 Paid Summer-Intern-Counselor, Ohio Bureau of Vocational
Rehabilitation

7/76 to Present

Probation Officer, Hamilton County Probation Department
6/89 Mentally Retarded Offender Project, Probation Officer

Married with 2 children

C. HABILITATION MEETINGS

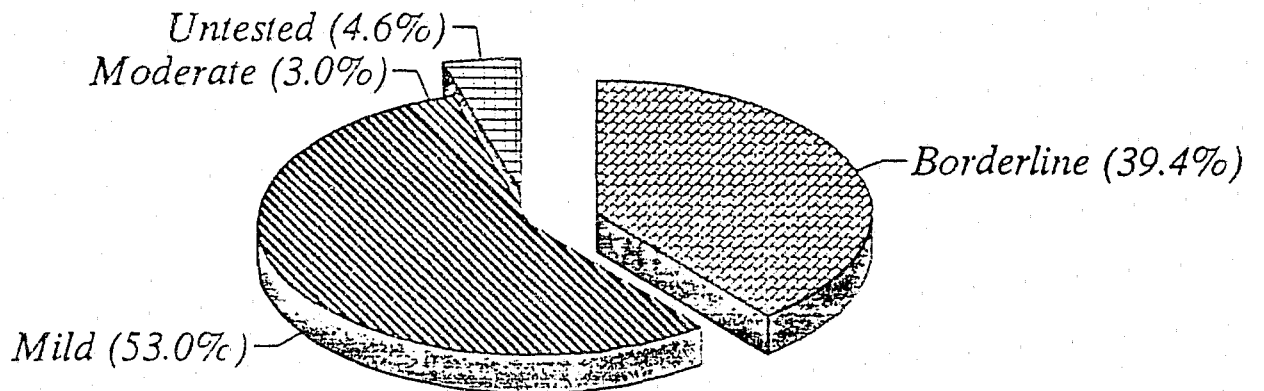
The habilitation process involves using varied resources and personnel expertise to develop the M.R.O.'s physical, social and residential independence. A monthly case review meeting is scheduled where knowledge is shared by psychologists, vocational counselors, case managers, MR/DD staff and any other significant support person. This is a problem solving group that plans individual treatment goals for the M.R.O.

D. ADDITIONAL SERVICES

The project also informally tracks an offender through the Criminal Justice System once identified by the Forensic Project, Bail Bond Project, the Courts, and the Presentence Unit. The M.R.O. probation officers have frequently consulted with case managers, whose clients have entered the Criminal Justice System and do not fully understand the court proceedings they will encounter in the Justice System.

III. PROFILE OF THE M.R.O.

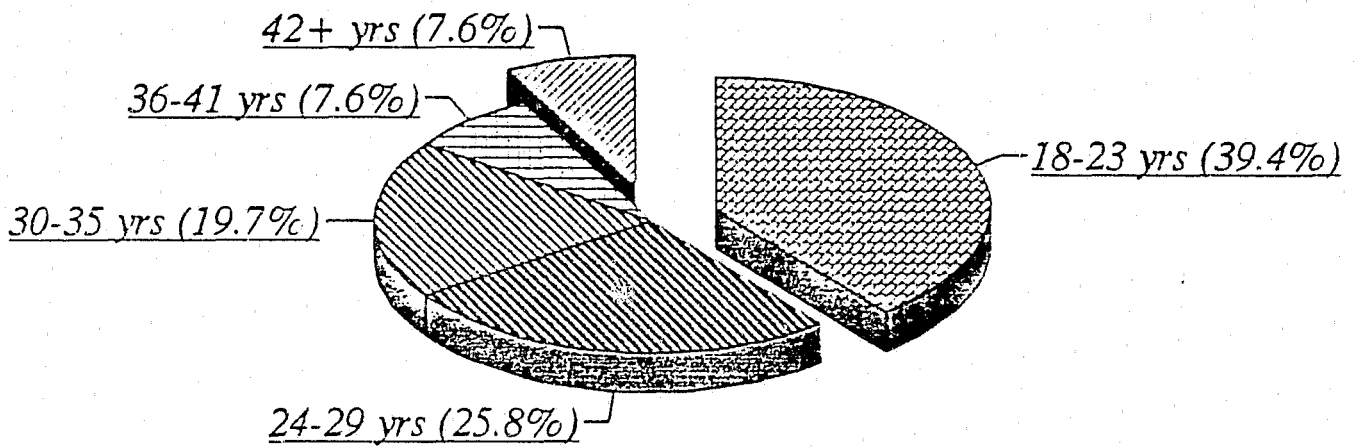
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Mentally Retarded Offender Project
6/89 to 5/90



A:

I.Q.

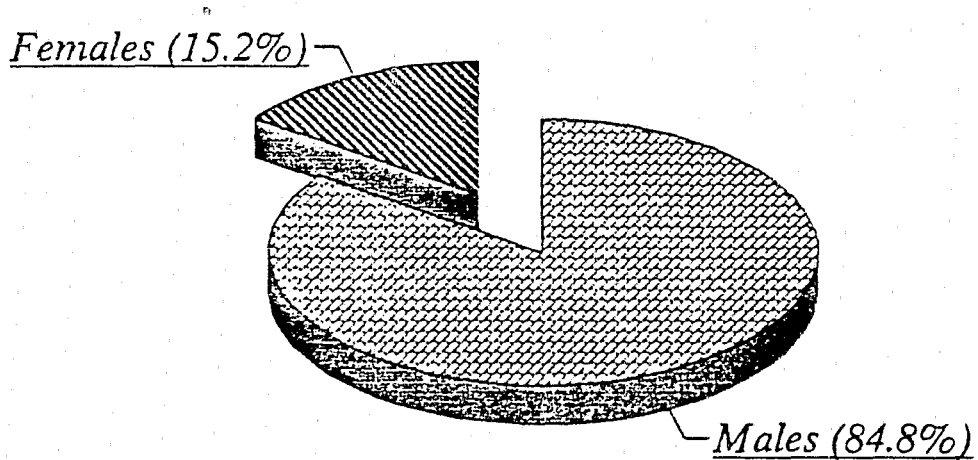
Hamilton County
Mentally Retarded Offender Project
6/89 to 5/90



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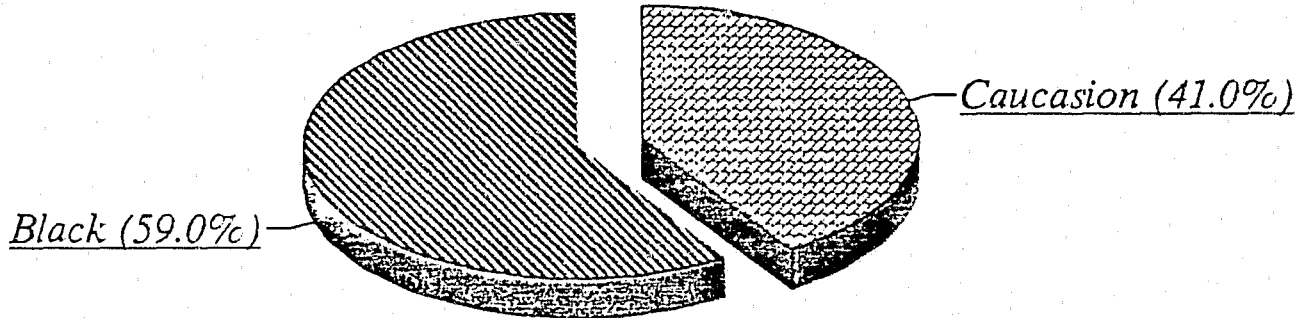
Age

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Mentally Retarded Offender Project
6/89 to 5/90



Gender

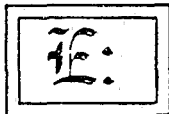
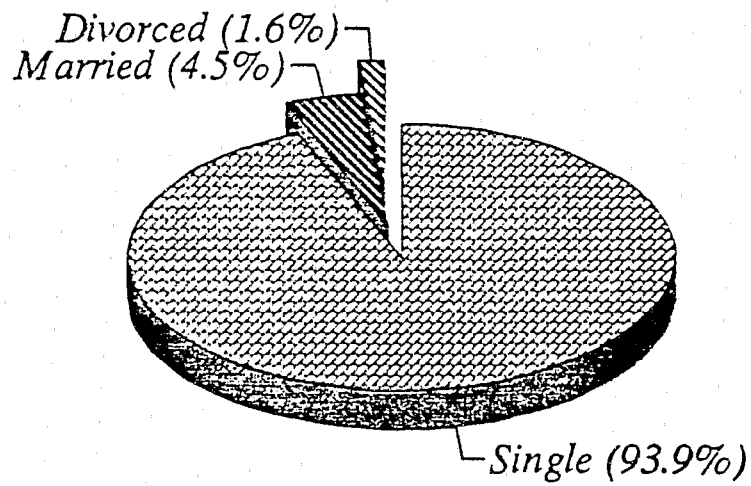
Hamilton County
Mentally Retarded Offender Project
6/89 to 5/90



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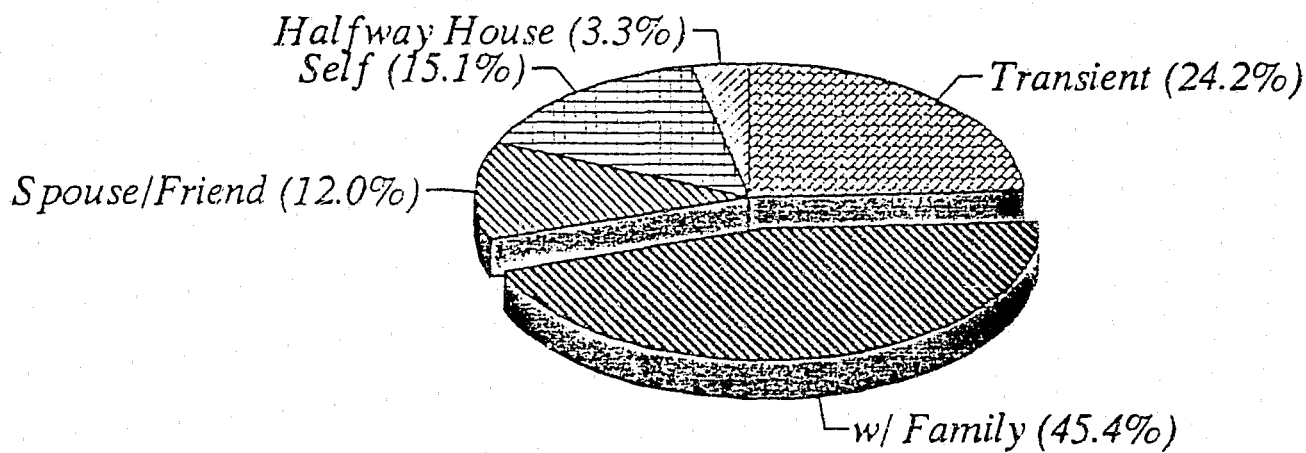
Race

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6/89 to 5/90



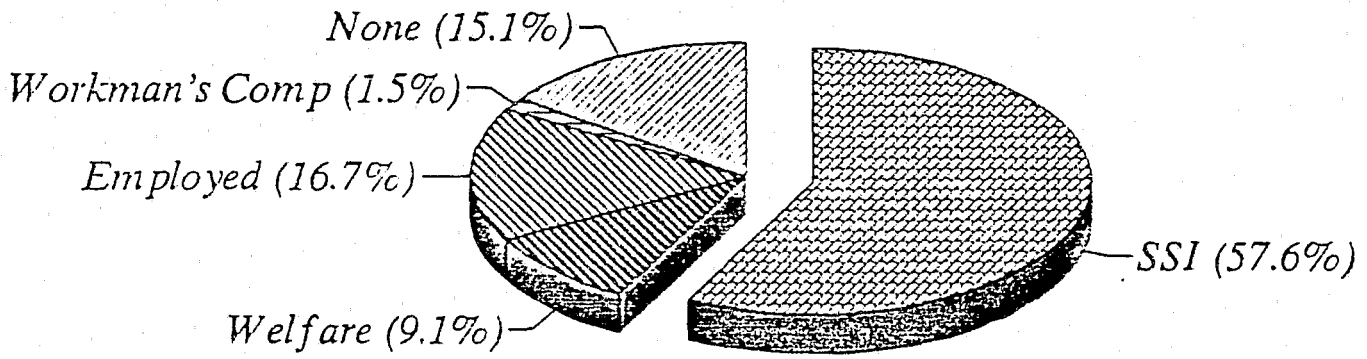
Marital Status

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6/89 to 5/90



Residence

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Mentally Retarded Offender Project
6/89 to 5/90

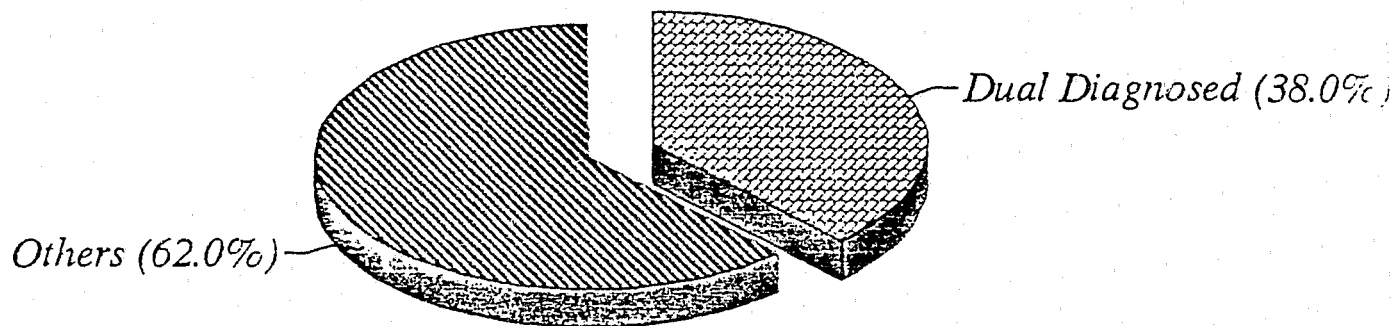


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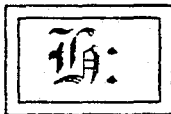
Income

Hamilton County Mentally Retarded Offender Project

6/89 to 5/90

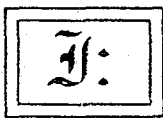
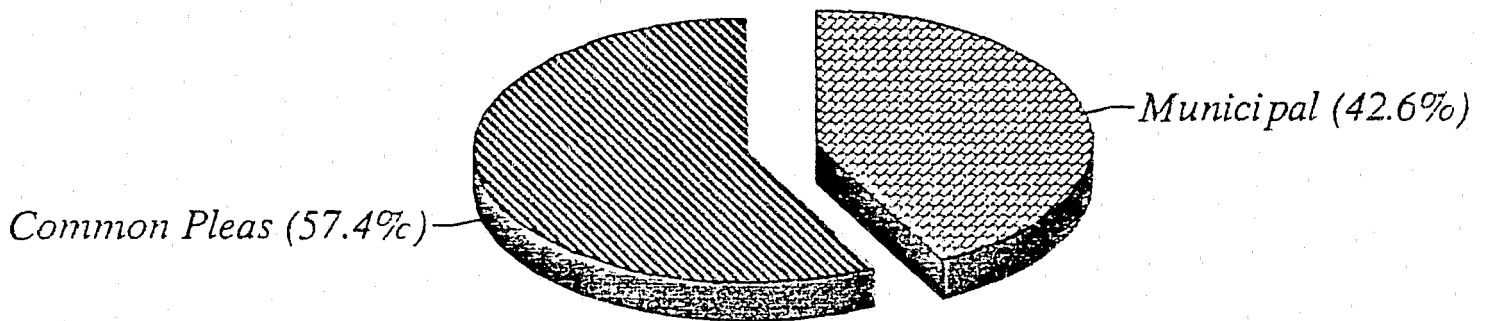


Dual Diagnosed - defined as mentally retarded with mental health problems, or mentally retarded with alcohol and drug dependency.



MRO Profile

Hamilton County
Mentally Retarded Offender Project
6/89 to 5/90



Court Referrals

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of M.R.O.'s fall within the mild range of mental retardation and thus are not eligible for many services. Their limitations disqualify them from other offender treatment programs who label them as "inappropriate." The State of Ohio Mental Retardation System offers the mildly retarded little funding and few supportive services. These offenders end up being ignored by both systems and fail to receive appropriate services from either discipline.

The enclosed graphs clearly illustrate the type of client that is being referred to this project. Typically, the M.R.O. is a single black male, who is mildly retarded and between the ages of 18-23. 57.6% are receiving SSI benefits and only 16.7% are employed. The SSI benefits amount to under \$6000 per year and so the average probationer lives in poverty. 45.4% live with family members and 24.2% are transient or homeless. 38% are dually diagnosed with either mental retardation and mental health issues or mental retardation and alcohol/drug dependencies.

The Hamilton County Mentally Retarded Offender Project has successfully provided a needed alternative for the mentally retarded offender and society by providing intensive supervision to ensure public safety while aiding the M.R.O. in accessing appropriate community agencies. This project has narrowed the margin between the MR System and the Criminal Justice System and has improved service delivery to the M.R.O. However, in the past year (1989-1990) the gap between the systems is still evident. The M.R.O. probation officers have identified several obstacles in providing the M.R.O. with the necessary services.

When an M.R.O. is released from jail, he is in need of a supportive service in order to adjust to society as this type of client is usually undereducated, indigent, and unskilled. The M.R.O. usually does not have family who are capable of assuming this supportive role and without intensive follow-up, recidivism is inevitable. In Hamilton County, there is a lack of a "hands-on" supportive service system for the M.R.O. There is a desperate need for an intensive case management system such as the Mental Health case management in this county.

One of the most critical needs, at this time, is the development of a long-term halfway house for the M.R.O. in Hamilton County. Placement of the M.R.O. in MR/DD group homes or residential facilities is difficult due to behavior problems. The criminal justice facilities, such as Talbert House have indicated that most M.R.O.'s are inappropriate for their facilities because the offenders could fall victim to other residents and client-staff ratios are insufficient for this special need probationer. As many M.R.O.'s are transient, live in shelters, or with acquaintances or family members who are involved in criminal activity, a M.R.O. residential facility would provide a supervised and secure environment which would allow for coordination of services to the client. We would recommend the development, in this county, of a facility, such as Alvis House in Columbus, Ohio or the Volunteers of America Northern Texas, Inc. Developmentally Disabled Offenders Program in Arlington, Texas.

Substance abuse among the M.R.O. is a major problem, not only in Hamilton County, but across the United States. Traditional treatment programs are usually not appropriate in dealing with the M.R.O. The M.R.O. probation officers have assisted the Court Psychiatric Clinic staff in development of a Substance Abuse Support Group for mentally retarded offenders, which began in July, 1990. However, a M.R.O. residential facility where substance abuse could be monitored and an appropriate treatment program could be delivered would be beneficial to both the community and the M.R.O.

In an effort to provide the M.R.O. with the appropriate services there appears to be a need for the development of an on-going training program for jail, court personnel, and various community agencies in the identification and treatment of the M.R.O. that falls within the mild range of mental retardation. An effective training program, the Echo Project developed by Dr. K. L. Curry, could be beneficial to those correctional personnel who deal directly with the M.R.O. This training program could be administered by the M.R.O. probation officers who are familiar with this type of client. There appears to be a need for a preventive training program at the school level in an effort to prevent the mentally retarded from entering the justice field at a young age. This type of program could be developed and presented by the M.R.O. probation officers to the Cincinnati Board of Education, to be presented in schools, such as Guilford.

Finally, an obstacle which needs to be addressed by the Ohio Legislators is a review of the State MR/DD funding standards and eligibility definitions to include the mild M.R. At the present time, the MR/DD system provides few supports for individuals who function in the mild range of mental retardation. The increased involvement of the mildly mentally retarded individual in the Criminal Justice System across the United States, indicates this population is in need of community supportive services in order to live a law abiding life.