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The National Criminal Justice Reference Service: NCJRS On-line

Presentation by

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### **About the National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

Before I tell you about National Criminal Justice Reference Service-*Online*, I'd first like to tell you something about the history of the Reference Service—what it is all about, what it does. The National Criminal Justice Reference Service, was established in 1972 by the United States Department of Justice as a national as well as international service for exchanging information related to criminal and juvenile justice. Within the United States Department of Justice is the Office of Justice Programs, whose mission is to help cities, counties, and states of the United States reduce crime and improve the administration of justice.

Each bureau within the Office of Justice Programs, and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (whose mission is stated in its name) has a separate center or clearinghouse under the "umbrella" of the overall Reference Service. These information centers and clearinghouses make available information about a broad range of topics in the field of criminal justice—victimization, juvenile offending, innovative programs to reduce crime, and substance abuse. Currently, there are more than 130,000 items in the NCJRS document data base, and in one recent 8-month period, we received and filled more than 52,000 requests for information.

### **The Shift from Old Modes of Information Exchange**

The traditional means of requesting and receiving information, and documents from the Reference Service has been by mail and phone and,

more recently, by facsimile (fax). These conventional methods will continue as long as needed by those we serve, but the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), which is part of the United States Department of Justice and which administers the Reference Service, has taken steps to use the technologies of the personal computer to automate these reference and dissemination functions, as well as to provide additional services.

In order to integrate all its electronic services and to join them to the International Information Infrastructure—the Internet—the National Institute of Justice has created NCJRS Online. Because of the Internet's ability to link to other computer networks anywhere in the world, the NIJ which primarily serves a domestic market—now has a new, broader capacity. The Internet enables the NIJ to make all the services and products it develops for the cities, counties and states of the United

States available to the states of the world, and to do so at minimal cost to those countries, and minimal cost to the Reference Service.

## NCJRS Online Features

What are some of the specific features of Online?

- E-Mail

- Electronic messaging permits almost instantaneous communication between NCJRS and our "customers."

- Users can write to individuals or to groups of individuals, through special addresses, such as:

- **ASK NCJRS!**. This service enables users to ask reference questions about criminal justice matters, order free publications, and receive instructions on using NCJRS Online.

The electronic mail function serves as a basis for other services, such as:

- **Listservs.** These are electronic mailing lists for exchanging information among groups of people who have shared, specific interests. Information posted to the list's address is automatically sent to all list subscribers. Listservs can be one-way (for example, users receive but do not send information) or

can serve as discussion groups (users can send as well as receive information). UNCJIN-L is such a group.

- JUSTINFO. This electronic newsletter, a one-way listserv, presents information about news, events and publications the bureaus of the Office of Justice Programs. The first issue of this twice-monthly newsletter, available to users with Internet e-mail, was posted February 1, 1995.

- Electronic Publication

One of the major features of NCJRS Online is electronic publication. All documents published this year and in subsequent years by the Office of Justice Programs, NIJ and all other bureaus are available electronically. Documents published in earlier years are being processed

so that they too will be available online.

- Sharing Resources

- By automating our processes, and by providing telecommunications access to our products and services we are taking the first small step in opening the information centers and libraries of the world to each other. File transfer from my desktop computer to

- your desktop computer is at hand!

- The ability to identify other Internet repositories of criminological information—at the UN-associated research institutes, within the ministries of interior and justice of various countries, in the courts and legislatures and universities to provide instant connection to them and their knowledge bases. This is the power the Internet and electronic "boutiques" like NCJRS Online bring us. (I encourage you



take advantage of it!)

◆ Cyberspace and Technospeak

The specialized software of the Internet often uses unfamiliar phrases, such as "World Wide Web", "gopher directories", "graphic user interface", "file transfer protocol," and "hypertext links," but these are all merely terms for technical pathways with guideposts to lead you from one place on the International Information Infrastructure to another. And to use them, you need not have any in-depth knowledge of the technology they are based on.

At NCJRS Online, you can rapidly and easily find and obtain the services and products I have just described. You can also find and electronically "travel" to other Internet sites to which we have provided

a link, a path, a pointer to help you connect. Of course, we are not unique in having access to these technologies. Internet access sites are gateways to the entire "Net". Each site features its own special purposes, special subject matter, and then refers or links to other sites where both related and different materials can be found.

NCJRS Online is intended to be that special Internet boutique where people working in United States justice agencies, and affiliated professionals, begin their criminal and juvenile justice information search. Starting from NCJRS Online, they can search the United States based Internet sites and find such things as U. S. supreme court decisions, or electronically leave our country to visit the document collections of the UN Crime Branch, to access files from Finland or Canada, or to ask questions of any of you who have chosen to join an electronic discussion forum (or listserv).

This is the beginning of a worldwide justice library without walls; the joining of information repositories to reduce crime in order to improve the operations of the criminal justice system around the world. In building NCJRS Online, NIJ is cooperating with the World Criminal Justice Library Network, with all institutes affiliated with the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, branch and with all our NCJRS International Document Exchange partners. During this workshop and continuously during the Congress at the exhibits, each of you can investigate and learn for yourself how you can link your own information data base to ours, or how to begin such computerization if you are just getting under way. I'd like to extend my personal invitation to you to visit the NCJRS exhibit, where we will be able to demonstrate to you on an individual basis what NCJRS Online has to offer.

I trust you share my belief that these are new and exciting

developments. Yet we, collectively, have only started. The Internet-based NCJRS Online services that I have just described have been up and running for only six months. We are at the beginning of a better way to help each other share advances in the improvement of the administration of justice worldwide. The United States Department of Justice, through the National Institute of Justice and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, in cooperation with the Crime Branch and all like-minded organizations and institutes, needs your participation-and stands ready to assist you.

Thank you.