

# National Institute of Corrections Virtual Conference 2016 Transcript for Interview with Glynis Eaton

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**Announcer:** This is the podcast of the National Institute of Corrections Virtual Conference. Please join us November 9, 2016 for our third annual conference titled *Leading with Innovation*, where you will receive a full day of presentations, innovative chats, and networking all brought to you by NIC. Visit us at [www.nicic.gov/go/VC2016](http://www.nicic.gov/go/VC2016) to register.

And now... here's a sneak peek!

**National Institute of Corrections:** I want to begin by going over the presentation description that you submitted. "Participants will learn how to create a training program specific to their unit needs. These training programs do not replace local, state, or federal basic training programs already in place, but work to enhance and speed up the training process. The purpose of the field training officer program is to provide the trainee with formal on-the-job training specific to day-to-day duties and needs. The program also serves as a succession planning tool to prepare trainers for management positions."

So, Glynis, let's actually begin with talking more about your background before we get into the program topic. So here I have that you are from the U.S. Probation Western District of North Carolina and you are a supervising U.S. Probation Officer.

**Eaton:** Yes, that's right.

**NIC:** Is that correct?

**Eaton:** Yes.

**NIC:** So how did you go come about coming into your position and then working on this topic here of the field training officer program?

**Eaton:** Sure. I can give you the long story or I can give you the short

story, but...

**NIC:** You can give whatever story makes you feel comfortable.

**Eaton:** Okay. Well, we worked on the field training officer program here in our district back when I was the program development specialist. So I believe that was in 2014. And when I was the program development specialist, I was also our training coordinator here in our district. And we just had a rash of new hires and lots of new training, new officers and we just started realizing...and we had known for some time, but we got to the point where we realized our current training program was not really cutting it. Our officers were going to the academy and they were getting a good, general basic training, but they still didn't have a lot of on-the-job knowledge. So it was during my time as a program development specialist that we developed this field training officer program here in our district.

**NIC:** Okay. So let's back it up just a little bit more. So you were the program development specialist. What does that mean you did in your facility?

**Eaton:** So here, in the U.S. Probation Office, as a program development specialist, it's essentially...you're in charge of all training and development and also any kind of new programs or current programs that need to be developed or are already in place.

**NIC:** Okay, and then what was your link to what the officers were learning out in the field to what you were doing at the facility?

**Eaton:** Sure. Well, officers, when they were hired, we had a program in place and we had tried several different programs. One was just how many people used to learn how to do their jobs. Just what I call a trial by fire method. "Here's your new caseload or here's your new assignment. Figure it out." And then we developed into a mentor program where you were assigned somebody who's like your buddy, who helped you out, who helped you learn your responsibilities and your day-to-day tasks, but it was not very formal. There was no set length or time, or there was no manual that went with this training. So what happened is that we had a lot of inconsistencies in our training so...and this really came to light when you'd have two new hires at the same time and one would have a mentor who did an excellent job, who stood by their side and helped them with every little question, answered text messages late at night, those kinds of things and was just an excellent mentor. And then we'd

have another mentor who'd kinda get burned out after the first couple of weeks and really needed to focus back on their job.

So you'd have two new hires with two very different training experiences and it just created a lot of inconsistencies in our training. And there were several other training methods that we had tried and tested throughout the years, but we realized that we needed a more comprehensive, formal training program for learning on-the-job functions.

**NIC:** Okay, and so this is how you came up with the field training officer program?

**Eaton:** Correct.

**NIC:** Okay. All right. So now tell us about that, the field training officer program.

**Eaton:** Okay. So we had tried this several years ago, but we really weren't in a good place for it. We had hired a few former police officers here in our district, and they had mentioned "Well, at the police department, we had a field training officer." And they always talked about these field training officers and what a good program it was and how they learned in their police departments, but we could never really figure out how to make that transition here. We don't have full-time employees who are dedicated to being trainers. We just don't have that kind of manpower, that kind of budget, but I always kept that in the back of my head.

So then I guess it was just happenstance that I became the program development specialist around the same time I also became a mentor, so I was one of these buddies that we were assigning people for a new officer. She just happened to be a former police officer who was training to be here in our district as a U.S. probation officer. Well, I got to experience some of those same issues as a trainer as I did as a trainee, and I gave her my full time and attention and helped her. But I realized that she still had questions six months on the job, one year on the job, one and a half years on the job. Well into her first two years of training, there was still a lot to learn that she hadn't learned that we just kept thinking, and other trainers were thinking "Oh, they'll just learn this on the job."

But with many correctional agencies, not just U.S. Probation, our jobs have changed so much over time. It's no longer five core duties that we

have to do as with most correctional agencies. People have increased responsibilities, 200 different acronyms they need to memorize, 800-page policy manuals and those things...you just can't pick up on that kind of information and that kind of training in a limited amount of time, in a short amount of time. So there really has to be...in order for everyone to learn consistently, there really has to be formalized training. And of course, many correctional agencies have an academy or a two-week program or a six-week program that people go to or new employees go to or new officers go to and they learn tons, but it's really...a lot of it's based on safety, or firearms training, or national policies, or very generic, general policies so that when you go back to your local office, you can learn what the local practices are. And that's what this field training officer program does, is it helps you learn your specific job functions with the local policies and practices in place.

**NIC:** Okay, and so you're saying that around the country, this onboarding program is not something that you traditionally see?

**Eaton:** No. So let me get back up a little bit into our research, when we started the program. So we realized "Okay, we need some more formalized training. What we're doing just really isn't working. New officers have questions still two years on the job and they're making major mistakes." That's another sign that you might need a new training program. If you have new employees who are making major mistakes one year into the job, something probably went wrong with their training. So we decided to...we thought about what all these officers had said, "Field training officers is the way to go," so we started looking into it.

Well, we did some research. What we really wanted to do is just find another district or find another probation office who was doing this and so we could just cut and paste their program, but we really struggled with that. We called federal and state probation offices all across the country. We must've talked to probably 50 different people, and we asked them "What kind of training do you have? What do you do for your new hires? Is it working?" And we heard the same story with each person. Each person would tell us "Oh, no. We're actually looking for a new training program," or "Our training program's not really working. We're looking for something new as well. We send people to the academy, yet new hires are still struggling." And then we also talked to new hires. So I asked our rookie officers "Hey, reach out to people across the country that you went to the academy with. See what their training experience is like. Just get a real-world answer for us. I don't want a formal email. Just talk to them and chat with them."

And they all had the same thing. They all said "Oh, our training stinks. I have so many questions. I wish I had somebody to help me." And a lot of it had to do with, really, the changing environment here in probation which was...you know, 20 years ago, you would learn...people were all in the office, there was no teleworking, people weren't out in the field all the time. So, really, a lot of it had to do with the environment, but back to...I'm getting off topic here. But really, we talked to probably 50 different people across the country and we really couldn't find a good program that we wanted to copy or cut and paste into our own program. Many of them were supervisors who helped training people, or they were doing the same thing we were doing, a mentor program. Other people were like "Training? What training? I got my caseload day one and they said 'Good luck!'"

So we realized "Okay, we're going to have to create our own from the bottom up." And that's when we started...we developed each specific, piece and the presentation that I gave gives key ingredients to an effective program, what makes a good program, what we've realized has worked and hasn't worked and that kind of thing.

**NIC:** Okay, great. Okay, so what you found was not that facilities were not giving their new hires training but that their training was not comprehensive enough, it wasn't meeting the new challenges of hires in their working environment today?

**Eaton:** Correct, yes.

**NIC:** So what type of struggles did you see that they were beginning to have? You sort of started to talk about that and then went back to the development of the program itself, but I would like to know what were the struggles that they were telling you that they had that they needed more assistance with.

**Eaton:** Sure. So it was just really different. Sometimes, if you try to teach somebody in, let's say, a very short time period, two or three weeks, which is kinda what our mentor program was averaging out to be because we didn't have a set time length. Two or three weeks just isn't enough time for a new employee to encounter all the different kinds of situations that they're going to encounter on the job. Sometimes you just don't get different referrals or just different circumstances that happen in those two to three weeks. So beyond the three-week or the four-week training period, people just still have a variety of questions. "What do I

when I can't get in touch with an offender? What do I do when somebody doesn't want to get rid of their firearm?" Just all kinds of different situations that they really needed answers to. And really, policies and procedures and national policy has gotten so big and so...you can give an 800-page manual to a new hire but you can't expect them to know it without effective training, and that was one of the problems we were having; we were just referring them to the manual, but they really needed that hands-on experience.

**NIC:** So you're finding that the training that you're providing is starting to become a little bit more comprehensive to meet those changing demands of the workforce? So this presentation that you'll be getting, is it something that would be useful for people in all levels of corrections? Let's say you're in the state and local as well as the federal, or would you say it may just be good for, maybe, state or something like that?

**Eaton:** No, this would absolutely apply to all different levels, and I'll give you an example of how that's the case. We implemented this as a field training officer program for our officers, and once we got all the kinks worked out, we liked it so much that we essentially duplicated the same model and method for our clerical staff. So, really, this is how our clerks are learning now as well. So it doesn't have to be...it can be a desk job. It can be an out-in-the-field job, working with inmates, working with offenders. It really can apply to any new hire situation.

**NIC:** Okay. I guess that's it. So is there anything that I didn't ask you that perhaps you want to share about your presentation or the FTO program with others?

**Eaton:** I think the only other important thing that you talked about a little bit was how it's a succession planning tool as well. So it's as much about the trainers as it is about the trainee, and sometimes programs that people have in place...if you don't put the emphasis on the trainer and help the trainer and reward the trainer in some way, then those trainers become burned out and don't want to be trainers anymore. So the emphasis on this model is just as much about the trainee as it is about the trainer, and for us, we turned it into a succession planning tool for our office. So people who become field training officers, they get to practice being supervisors, they get to practice being managers, they're critiqued and evaluated as well and also rewarded many times in the future with those promotional opportunities.

**NIC:** Okay.

**Eaton:** I think that's just as important as the trainee.

**NIC:** And that is exciting. So what sort of incentives do you provide to people, I mean, other than the opportunity to model being in that supervisory position?

**Eaton:** Sure. There's several incentives, and one is they do receive a temporary pay increase for the time that they are a trainer. So that's always nice. People love a monetary incentive. Secondly, the way the program is laid out...and this is something that, if you attend the training, you'll learn more about. One of the key ingredients is that the new trainee cannot have responsibilities or work responsibilities, at least during the first portion of the training program. So the trainer is actually working with the trainee on their own work. So their own work is getting just as much attention as it did prior to them becoming a trainer, if not more attention, because you have two people working on one set of responsibilities.

And lastly, what we also try to do for our trainers, or in this model for your trainers is you need to come up with your own personal...your own local incentives that you can put in place. Just get creative and think about what can you do for your trainers. For us, it was not assign them new cases during this training period, not assign them...they don't get collateral investigations and those kinds of things. So you try to take away certain things to help incentivize trainers to become trainers.

**NIC:** That sounds wonderful. I really look forward to hearing your presentation.

**Eaton:** Thank you.

**NIC:** Okay, Glynis. Thank you so much for all of that fantastic information.

**Announcer:** This has been a broadcast of the National Institute of Corrections. The views presented are those of the speakers and do not necessarily represent the policies or position of the National Institute of Corrections.

We hope you enjoyed this broadcast.

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