



Training for Tracking

Access to the Internet is so commonplace that limiting usage for parolees is equivalent to limiting telephone usage—almost impossible. In fact, courts seldom limit Internet access as a term of probation. However, a court can determine what type of materials an offender is forbidden to access. As a result, to be effective, parole and probation officers need the computer savvy—and the tools—to track the activities of an offender who may be much more technologically astute.

That effectiveness came to bear for George J. Stallworth, a probation and parole officer for the Sex Offender Unit of Tennessee's Board of Probation and Parole, and Dan Newby, a parole and probation officer and fugitive investigator for Iowa's 4th Judicial Fugitive Investigation Unit. Both officers had completed a course titled "Managing Sex Offenders' Computer Use: A 2-Day Technical Training for Probation and Parole Officers."

The no-cost course, offered at 10 sites per year through the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)—Rocky Mountain in Denver, Colorado, provides a comprehensive set of skills and tools for parole and probation officers to manage and monitor offenders' behavior on the Internet, identify parole violations, and prevent the commission of future crimes. NLECTC—Rocky Mountain is a program of the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice. The course also is offered approximately once a year in Colorado through the American Probation and Parole Association.

The success of this course program is being seen in the field, says Jim Tanner, one of the course instructors at NLECTC—Rocky Mountain. Tanner says he has been receiving reports from his graduates who are getting convictions resulting from their new skills. Two of those success stories come from Stallworth and Newby.

Stallworth participated in the course several years ago. As part of the course materials, he received a disc with software that enables an officer to search the hard drive of an offender's computer.

"Following the training, I used this disk and searched an offender on my caseload and found images of child porn," Stallworth says. The district attorney and the sex crimes unit of the Metropolitan Nashville Police Department were called in, and the offender's drives were seized and searched. More than 60,000 images of child pornography were found in the drives and software belonging to this offender. Many of the images appeared to have been taken by the offender in his residence.

In a note of appreciation to NLECTC—Rocky Mountain, Stallworth says: "The offender has finally been adjudicated on these new charges and received a 5-year Federal sentence in conjunction with the State time he was already facing. I felt it necessary to inform you of the fruits of your work and efforts. Thank you, so much. Since your training and the arrest of this offender, I have been favorably called upon statewide to provide training in the supervision of sex offenders. The children of Tennessee and many other states are safer as a result of your diligence."

Because technology is always evolving, NLECTC—Rocky Mountain regularly updates course materials to stay current. The course has always provided software for the officers to use in their cases, but center staff recently developed freeware specifically for parole and probation officers to use when investigating an offender's computer. The program, called Field Search, has been part of the training since September 2005 and is proving very effective.

Stallworth says he replaced his older program with the Field Search software and has had tremendous success. "I love Field Search. I have used it for seven or eight searches and all of them have turned up probation violations. In addition, the reports are absolutely wonderful. I can use them in court, I can e-mail them, or I can keep them in my files to provide a full printout of exactly what has been done on a specific offender's computer."

Newby reported that he had immediate success using the new Field Search software.

“The software is great,” Newby says. “[Using the Field Search software] I was able to detect that a sex offender was looking at porn. My previous attempt to detect porn usage by the sex offender failed. I went back with the Field Search software and, after conducting a ‘raw scan,’ I hit the jackpot and found hundreds of pornographic URLs that he had visited.

“To make a long story short, the sex offender then failed his polygraph and will now be sent back to the State of Minnesota, where he transferred from. This software made it possible to detect his behavior, which was a violation of the conditions of supervision, when the other software I had been using failed. The software has helped make our community safer.”

Newby adds that in another case, “the man had completely denied having any involvement in the crime [child molestation], or any interest in teens. The raw scan feature of the Field Search program turned up visits to a lot of teen-oriented, really nasty, websites on his computer. He had used ‘wiping’ software to avoid detection, but Field Search was able to track the usage.”

After the successes Newby had using his training from “Managing Sex Offenders’ Computer Use,” he arranged to bring the course to his department. “The class was filled to capacity,” he says, “and people had to be turned away. There is a very high level of interest in this topic.”

According to Joe Russo, program manager for corrections at NLECTC–Rocky Mountain, the course is very hands on. Trainers bring in the computers of actual

offenders, who are not identified, allowing officers to use the software in real situations. In addition, he says, NLECTC–Rocky Mountain has developed the program so it can be taken on the road and offered at no cost to any agency or group of agencies with access to a computer lab and a commitment to implementing a computer monitoring program. More than 440 officers in 16 States have taken the training already, he adds.

The Field Search program is now available to parole and probation officers through the website of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center at www.justnet.org/fieldsearch/.

For more information about “Managing Sex Offenders’ Computer Use: A 2-Day Technical Training for Probation and Parole Officers,” contact Joe Russo, 800-416-8086 or JRusso@du.edu. Information about the course also can be found in the article titled “Monitoring’ the Sex Offender” in the Winter 2005 edition of TechBeat. Visit www.justnet.org/techbeat/winter2005/.



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