



## SUBORDINATE COURTS' STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE ORDERS JULY - AUGUST 1998

### INTRODUCTION

**T**he Community Service Order (CSO) was recommended by the Committee to Review the Children and Young Persons Act, 1993<sup>1</sup> as a Court sentencing option in dealing with young offenders. This recommendation was subsequently accepted by the government's Inter-Ministry Committee on Dysfunctional Families, Juvenile Delinquency and Drug Abuse<sup>2</sup>.

The CSO is an order of the Court requiring the offender to perform unpaid work for a specific number of hours. It is currently implemented as a term of the probation order. The objectives of introducing the CSO are threefold :

(i) As a rehabilitative measure, the CSO offers positive experience through community work which helps to develop empathy and consideration for others while gaining meaningful social experiences, developing constructive social and relationship skills, and in the process, restore self confidence and esteem;

- (ii) The CSO also serves as a form of punishment by way of depriving the offender of part of his/her leisure hours for community service;
- (iii) It also acts as an effective means for the offender to make amends by providing services to the community or its less fortunate members.

The Community Service Unit (CSU) was set up in 7 December 1996 under what was formerly the Rehabilitation Services Branch<sup>3</sup> of the Ministry of Community Development (MCD) to implement the CSO scheme in close consultation with the Subordinate Courts, participating agencies on the CSO scheme and investigating probation officers. The Juvenile Court imposed its first CSO on 17 Dec 1996 and a six months pilot run was conducted by the CSU from December 1996. A mid-review of the CSO scheme was also conducted by them during the pilot-run to evaluate and fine tune work procedures. The first CSO for an adult probationer was imposed by the Subordinate Courts on 22nd June 1997.

In July 1998, a working group comprising judges and senior officers from the Subordinate Courts and senior officers from the Ministry of Community Development

1 Chaired by District Judge F G Remedios with representatives from the Subordinate Courts, Attorney-General's Chambers, Singapore Police Force, Prisons Dept, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Community Development and Dept of Social Work & Psychology, NUS.

2 Chaired by Mr Abdullah Tarmugi with representatives from the Ministries of Health & Education, the Ministry of Information and the Arts, the Ministries of Law and Home Affairs, Dept of Social Work & Psychology, NUS, Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Society Against Family Violence, Mendaki, Singapore Council of Women's Organisations, SINDA, Association of Muslim Professionals and Singapore Malay Teachers' Union.

3 Probation Services Branch of the Rehabilitation & Protection Division wef 1 Oct 1998.

(MCD) was formed to assess the effectiveness of CSO. Apart from analysing available information on breaches and re-offending, a survey was conducted in August 1998 to obtain feedback on the CSO scheme. A total of 102 adult probationers<sup>4</sup> and 100 juvenile delinquents<sup>5</sup> were issued with CSO from December 1996 to August 1998.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Three target groups were identified for the survey:

- (a) Probationers who had completed their CSOs
- (b) Probationers' parent(s)/guardian(s)
- (c) Agencies involved in the CSO scheme

As at end-July 1998, a total of 97 of the 202 probationers had completed their CSOs. The study was focused on 93 of the 97 probationers and their parents or guardians. Four of the 97 were excluded as three were sent to Reformative Training Centre (RTC) [1 for breach during probation and 2 for re-offending after their probation] and the remaining one was sent to the Approved School for committing of a fresh offence while on probation.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the aid of 16 volunteer probation officers, officers from MCD as well as court interpreters. The probationer and his/her parent(s) were interviewed separately. Questionnaires were also sent by mail to 27 of the participating agencies to obtain their feedback. A total of 25 responses were received.

4 Adult probationers aged 16-23 years.

5 Juvenile probationers aged below 16 years.

6 Information provided by CSU.

7 Age as at date of sentence given.

## PROFILE OF PROBATIONERS<sup>6</sup>

### Demographic Profile

Of the 93 probationers who participated in the survey, 46 were juveniles and 47 adults. Males constituted 73% and females 27%. Majority (88%) of the probationers were aged between 14 and 18 years old. Chinese accounted for 75%, Malays 17% and Indians 7% (Table 1).

Almost 9 in 10 had attained secondary education. 61% of the probationers were still schooling, followed by 20% gainfully employed, 16% unemployed and 3% in National Service. 88% of the 93 probationers had some form of religious beliefs - 45% were Buddhists, 18% Muslims, 15% Christians, 6% Hindus and 4% Taoists (Table 1). 93% of the probationers resided in HDB flats while the remaining 7% stayed in private housing.

TABLE 1  
Demographic Profile of Probationers  
(N=93)

GENDER		RELIGION	
	NO. (%)		NO. (%)
Male	68 (73%)	Buddhism	42 (45%)
Female	25 (27%)	Islam	17 (18%)
		Christianity	14 (15%)
		Hinduism	5 (6%)
		Taoism	4 (4%)
		No Religion	11 (12%)
AGE <sup>7</sup>		HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED	
	NO. (%)		NO. (%)
14	15 (16%)	No Formal Education	0 (0%)
15	22 (24%)	Primary	4 (4%)
16	17 (18%)	Secondary	80 (86%)
17	19 (20%)	Vocational	8 (9%)
18	9 (10%)	Pre-University	1 (1%)
19	5 (6%)		
20	3 (3%)	ECONOMIC ACTIVITY STATUS	
21	2 (2%)		NO. (%)
22	0 (0%)	Employed	18 (20%)
23	1 (1%)	Unemployed	15 (16%)
		National Service	3 (3%)
		Schooling	57 (61%)
ETHNIC GROUP			
	NO. (%)		
Chinese	70 (75%)		
Malay	16 (17%)		
Indian	6 (7%)		
Others	1 (1%)		



**TABLE 2**  
Offence Committed  
(N=93)

Type of Offence Committed	Percent (N=93)
Theft	30.1%
Unlawful Assembly	19.4%
Rioting	15.1%
Shoplifting	14.0%
Voluntarily Causing Hurt	7.5%
Possession of Offensive Weapons	6.5%
Affray	4.3%
Other Offences Against Public Order	3.2%
Fraudulent Possession	3.2%
Vandalism	2.2%
Misappropriation of Property	2.2%
Usage of Criminal Force	1.1%
Trespassing	1.1%
Traffic Offence	1.1%
Housebreaking	1.1%
Giving False Evidence	1.1%
Gang Robbery	1.1%
Forgery	1.1%
Criminal Intimidation	1.1%
Causing Mischief	1.1%
Carnal Connections	1.1%
Other Offences	3.2%
Probationers with 1 Offence	82.8%
Probationers with 2 Offences	12.9%
Probationers with 3 Offences	4.3%

**Offence Committed**

3 in 10 of the probationers committed theft offences, followed by unlawful assembly (19%), rioting (15%) and shoplifting (14%) (Table 2). Majority of the probationers (83%) committed only one offence.

**Agencies Placed In**

Majority of the probationers served their CSOs at the Homes for the Aged (63%), followed by Homes for the Disabled (14%) and the Jurong Bird Park & Singapore Zoological Gardens (14%). Four of the 93 probationers were assigned to more than one agency to carry out the CSO. (Table 3).

8 Information provided by CSU.

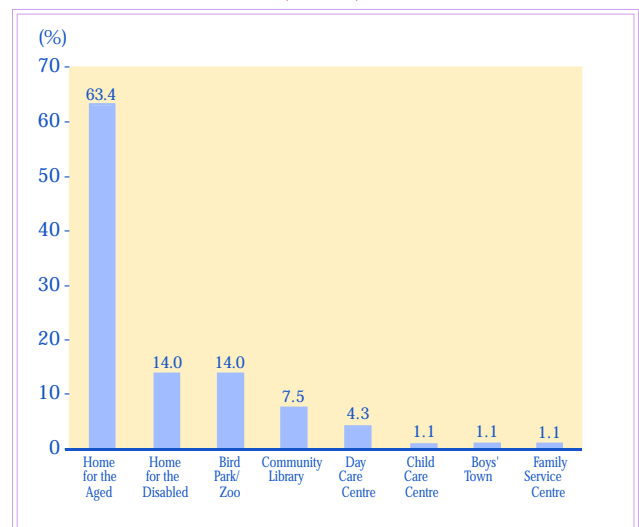
**PROFILE OF PARENTS<sup>8</sup>**

83% of the probationers' parents were married, 12% were divorced and 1% separated. The remaining 4% were widowed (Table 4). Majority (79%) of the parents were Buddhists (48%), Muslims (18%) and Christians (13%).

In terms of highest qualification attained, a large proportion of the parents had attained secondary education - 52% for the probationers' father and 43% for the mother. As for their occupation, 46% of the probationers' father were service/shop/market sale workers, followed by 25% who were technicians/associate professionals. One third of the probationers' mother were service/shop/market sale workers, followed by 31% who were unemployed/retired/full-time housewives.

Fathers earning between \$1,000 to \$1,999 per month accounted for 40%. This is followed by 24% who earned between \$2,000 and \$2,999 per month. The mothers of the probationers recorded a lower income profile- 31% with no income and 30% with less than \$1,000 per month.

**TABLE 3**  
Types of Agencies Probationers Were Placed in to Serve their CSO  
(N = 93)



Note : There were 4 probationers placed in more than one agency.



**TABLE 4**  
Profile of Probationers' Parents  
(N=93)

MARITAL STATUS	PARENTS	
Married	77 (83%)	
Divorced	11 (12%)	
Separated	1 (1%)	
Widowed	4 (4%)	
RELIGION	PARENTS	
Buddhism	45 (48%)	
Islam	17 (18%)	
Christianity	12 (13%)	
Taoism	8 (9%)	
Hinduism	3 (3%)	
No Religion	8 (9%)	
EDUCATION	FATHER	MOTHER
No Formal Education	6 (6%)	10 (11%)
Primary	33 (36%)	37 (40%)
Secondary	48 (52%)	40 (43%)
Tertiary	6 (6%)	6 (6%)
MONTHLY INCOME	FATHER	MOTHER
No Income	1 (1%)	29 (31%)
Below \$1,000	10 (11%)	28 (30%)
\$1,000 - \$1,999	37 (40%)	26 (28%)
\$2,000 - \$2,999	22 (24%)	7 (8%)
\$3,000 - \$3,999	8 (8%)	0 (0%)
\$4,000 - \$4,999	7 (8%)	0 (0%)
Above \$5,000	8 (8%)	3 (3%)
OCCUPATION	FATHER	MOTHER
Legislators, Senior Officials & Managers	8 (9%)	5 (6%)
Professionals	4 (4%)	3 (3%)
Technicians & Assoc Professionals	23 (25%)	4 (4%)
Clerical Workers	2 (2%)	11 (12%)
Service Workers & Shop & Market Sale Workers	43 (46%)	31 (33%)
Plant/Machine Operators / Assemblers	6 (6%)	7 (8%)
Cleaners & Labourers	5 (6%)	3 (3%)
Unemployed/Retired/Housewives	2 (2%)	29 (31%)

**TABLE 5**  
Probationers' Feedback in Relation to the Objectives of the CSO Scheme

FEEDBACK	RESPONSES (N=93)
Probationers who felt that the briefing by the CSU officers before the CSO placement was useful	85 (91%)
Probationers who perceived CSO as a punishment for their offences	58 (62%)
Probationers who viewed CSO as being related to the offence committed	50 (54%)
Probationers who felt that their CSO placement had deprived them of their leisure	32 (34%)
Probationers who indicated that they have acquired new skills/knowledge/traits during the CSO placement	79 (85%)

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### Probationers' Feedback

#### Experiences vs Objectives of CSO

All 93 probationers were briefed by the CSU officer on the CSO scheme before the start of their placement. 91% or 85 of them found the briefing useful in terms of what to expect and how to prepare, both mentally and emotionally, for their CSO placement (Table 5). Among the 8 probationers who did not find the briefing useful, 3 were not listening or paying attention to the briefing, one could not understand and 2 found the briefing by the officer from the agency more helpful.

Only 62% of the 93 probationers perceived CSO as a punishment for their offence (Table 5). The remaining 38% who did not perceive CSO as a punishment felt that the CSO placement has provided them with an opportunity to help the needy and do something useful for the society. Some enjoyed their CSO placement and hence did not feel that they were being punished.

Slightly more than half (54%) of the probationers viewed the CSO placement as being related to the offence they had committed (Table 5). The remaining 46% did not see the connection between the offence committed and the work performed at the agencies. For example, a probationer who committed theft felt that the CSO placement did not teach him not to steal. This highlighted the problem faced by the CSU in assigning probationers who committed theft or theft related offences to the various agencies for community work.

Two thirds or 61 of the 93 probationers felt that the CSO placement had not deprived them of their leisure time (Table 5). 31% of the 61 cited that the schedule of the CSO did not intervene with their leisure time. 21% felt that they were not deprived of their leisure time as they found it a pleasure to do community work. 16%



indicated that CSO was done during school holidays or on weekends and thus did not interfere with their leisure time. The remaining probationers either said that they had nothing much to do during their leisure times, such that doing community work did not deprive them of their leisure time or they still had a lot of free time even with the CSO placement.

A significant 85% agreed that they had acquired new skills/knowledge during the CSO placement (Table 5). These included 37% who had acquired housekeeping skills like gardening, cleaning, cooking and 7% who acquired office skills. 27% gained the knowledge and skill of how to look after/take care of the elderly/young children or birds/animals. 19% acquired better communication skills. The others had learned to be more

understanding, patient, responsible, self-disciplined and tolerant (Table 6).

### Description of Work Done at CSO Placement

89% of the probationers felt that the people that they had contact with during the placement had benefited from the work they had done.

A high percentage of the probationers (95%) described the work done at the agency as “worthwhile”, 82% found it “enjoyable“, 81% felt that it was an “interesting“ experience and 79% indicated that their work done was “varied” (Table 7).

Slightly more than one third of the 93 probationers felt that the work was “boring”. Only 18% found it “difficult“, 16% felt “frustrated“ and 10% were not satisfied (Table 7).

**TABLE 6**  
New Skills/Knowledge/Traits Acquired During CSO Placement

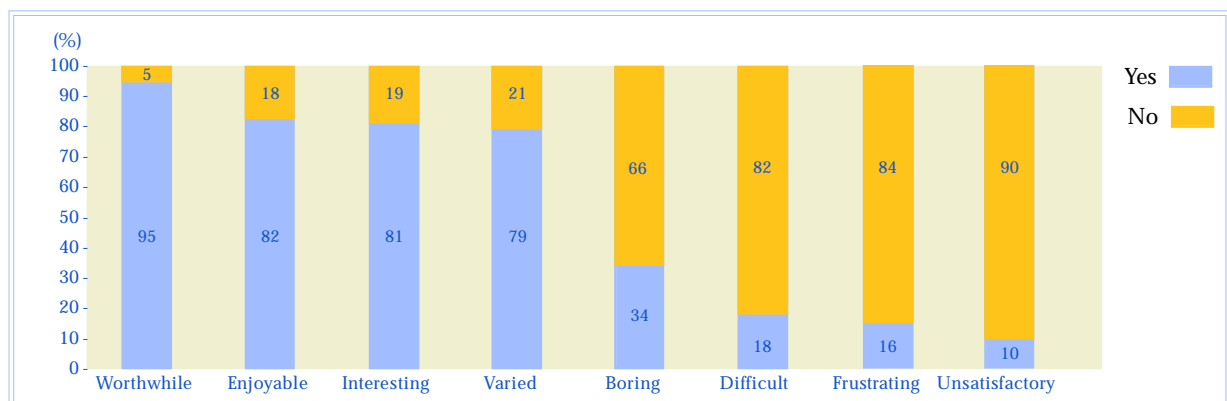
SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE/ TRAITS ACQUIRED	RESPONSES (N=79)
Housekeeping/Office Skills	35 (44%)
Taking Care/Better Understanding of the Elderly/Disabled/Children/Animals	21 (27%)
Communication/Interpersonal Skills	15 (19%)
Understand/Appreciate Parents	9 (11%)
Patience	5 (6%)
Responsibility	3 (4%)
Respect	3 (4%)
Empathy	3 (4%)
Self-Discipline	2 (3%)
Tolerance	1 (1%)

Note : There may be more than one skill/knowledge/trait acquired.

### Impact of CSO Placement on Relationship with Family

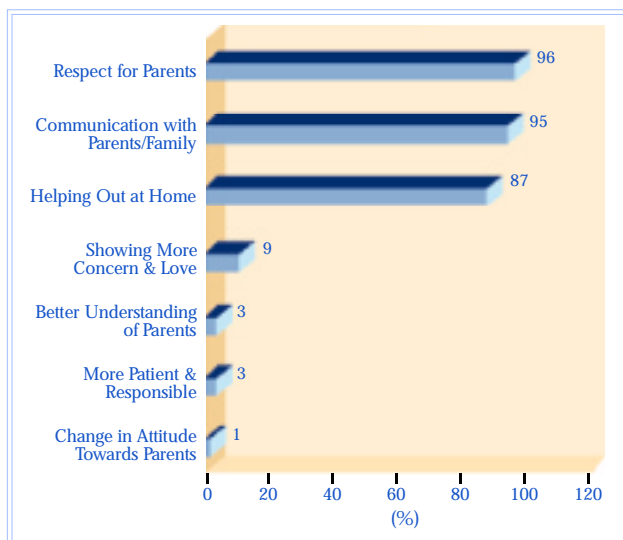
When asked if CSO has, in some way, improved their relationship with their parents/family members, 81% or 75 probationers gave positive responses. Among these 75 probationers, 95% stated improvement in family communication, 96% gained more respect for their parents and 87% made themselves more useful at home. Other areas of improvements included showing more concern, care and love to the parents (Table 8).

**TABLE 7**  
Description of Work Done at CSO Placement



**TABLE 8**

**Impact of CSO on the Relationship with Parents/Family Members**  
(N = 75)



Note : More than one area of improvement may be cited for each probationer.

**TABLE 9**

**Impact of CSO on the Probationers**

IMPACT OF CSO ON THE PROBATIONERS	RESPONSES (N=93)
Enabled them to spend their time more meaningfully	89 (96%)
Improvement in respect for authority/rules	88 (95%)
Developed more empathy and consideration for others	87 (94%)
Gained valuable and meaningful experiences	87 (94%)
Became more responsible	85 (91%)
Developed constructive social skills	83 (89%)
Became more self-confident and have better self-esteem	76 (82%)
They have made amends for their offence	70 (75%)

**Impact of CSO Placement on Themselves**

91% of the probationers agreed that CSO had made them more responsible. 95% of them indicated an improvement in the area of respecting authority/rules. Some 96% of them agreed that their contribution to the community through CSO had enabled them to spend their time more meaningfully. Three-quarters of them felt that they had made amends for their offence by providing personal service to the community. For those who felt otherwise, 44% of them said that they have not done enough to pay back to society for what they did.

9 The parent of one probationer refused to be interviewed.

Among the 93 probationers, 94% of them have developed more empathy and consideration for others during the CSO placement. A similar proportion of them had also gained valuable and meaningful experiences. Some 89% of the probationers said that they had developed constructive social skills in relating to people during the CSO placement. 82% have become more self-confident and have better self-esteem (Table 9).

**Parents' Feedback**

Out of the 92<sup>9</sup> parents interviewed, 91% were aware of the purpose and objective of CSO. 71% saw the CSO placement as being related to the offence committed by their children. 87% of them felt that the CSO placement did not deprive their children of their leisure time.

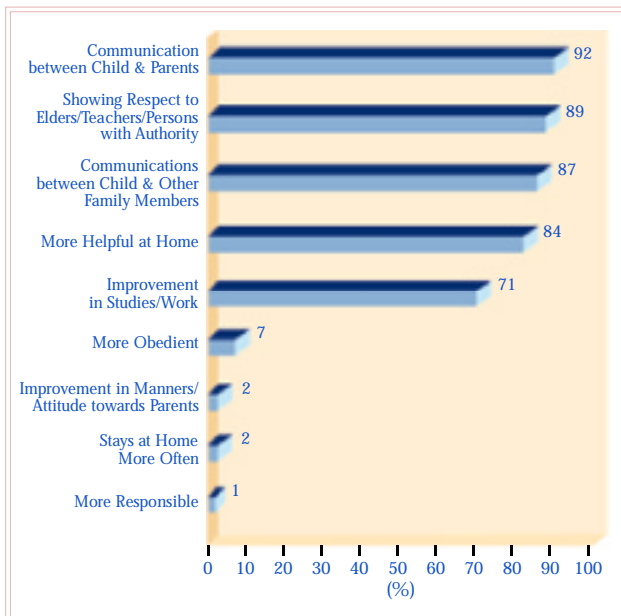
A high proportion (97%) of the parents were aware of the tasks assigned to their child(ren) at the agencies. An equal proportion indicated that their children kept them informed of the work done at the CSO placement.

All (97%), except 3 parents noticed an improvement in their children' behaviour after the CSO placement. Majority indicated that there were improvements in areas such as communication, showing more respect to them/ others, being more helpful at home as well as improvements in studies and work (Table 10).

Almost all (99%) of the parents felt that their children had benefited from the CSO placement, 65% of them felt that their children had acquired new skills or knowledge as a result of the CSO placement. All the parents felt that their children had utilised his/her time constructively and meaningfully during their CSO attachment. The parents' major concern was how the CSO placement would affect their children's studies. Concerns on travelling time and distances to the agency were also noted.



**TABLE 10**  
Areas of Improvements in the Behaviour of their Children  
(N = 92)



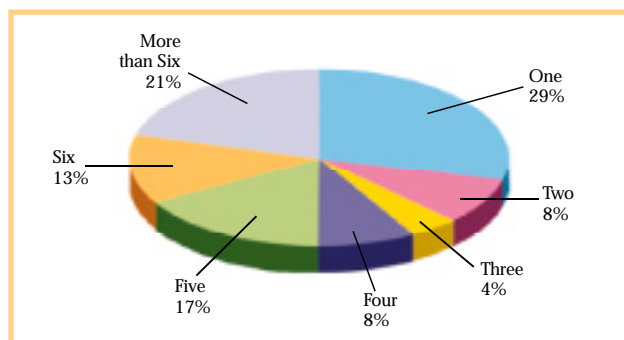
Note : More than one area of improvement may be cited for each probationer.

### Participating Agencies' Feedback

Out of the 25 responses received from the agencies, only 1 had not taken up any placement. Its main reason was due to its lack of manpower and expertise to supervise and assign work to the probationers.

7 of the 24 agencies (29%) had taken in only one probationer on CSO assignment at the time of the survey. Four of them (17%) had taken in 5 probationers and 3 (13%) had taken in 6 (Table 11). 2 of the 24 (8.3%)

**TABLE 11**  
Number of Probationers Taken by the Agencies  
(N = 24)



agencies had taken in 12 probationers since the CSO scheme began.

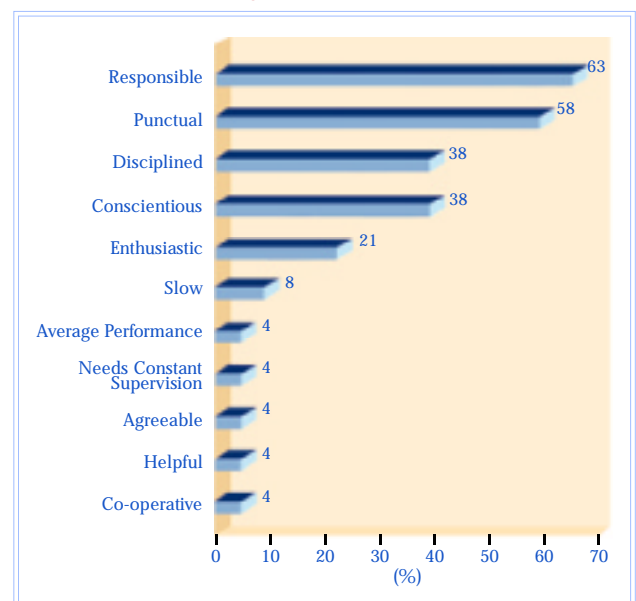
2 in 10 of the agencies, which responded, indicated that they had encountered problems with the probationers when assigning work to them. The most common problem cited was the supervision of the probationer(s), especially during times when more than one probationer was assigned to them.

All agencies agreed that the behaviour of the probationers during the CSO placement was acceptable, 92% felt that the work assigned to the probationers was carried out within a satisfactory time.

On the whole, all of the agencies were satisfied with the performance of the probationer(s) during the CSO placement with 50% giving a rating of "Satisfactory", 42% with "Good" and 8% "Very Good".

Most of the agencies described the probationer(s) on the job as responsible and punctual. Other positive comments include "conscientious", "disciplined" and "enthusiastic" (Table 12).

**TABLE 12**  
Agencies' Description of Probationers' Behaviour during the CSO Placement



Note : More than one description may be cited.



## CONCLUSION

A total of 97 probationers had completed their CSOs as at end-July 1998. Out of these was a breach rate<sup>10</sup> of 4% and a re-offending rate of 3%. The survey results of the remaining 93 probationers, their parents/guardians and the 24 participating agencies in the CSO scheme generally showed positive feedback.

One of the objectives of the CSO scheme was to sanction by way of depriving the probationer of part of his/her leisure hours. While a substantial proportion of 62% of the probationers perceived CSO as a punishment, only 54% can relate their CSO placement to their offences and only 34% felt that they were deprived of their leisure hours. Most of these probationers do not find the CSO placement as a punishment as they felt that they had a meaningful and constructive time, and had gained enriching experiences. By providing their services to the community, 75% of the probationers felt that they have made amends for their offences.

The CSO has also been effective as a rehabilitative measure as the responses showed that the CSO experience had helped the probationers to develop empathy and consideration for others while gaining meaningful social experiences. Most probationers felt that their CSO placement have a positive impact on their relationship with their families and have helped them personally in the development of their personality and character. The parents have also noticed positive behavioural changes in their children after the CSO placement. 85% indicated that they have acquired new skills/knowledge/traits. The parents' responses to this were also affirmative with 65% who felt that their children had learnt some new skills.

Positive feedback on the behaviour of the probationers were also gathered from the participating agencies. They did not encounter any major problem when assigning work to them. There was no damage done by the probationers; nor were there any disputes or arguments between the agencies' personnel and the probationer(s). However, agencies had voiced their main concern of the lack of manpower to supervise the probationers on CSO. Perhaps more effort could be channeled to strengthen their teams to supervise the probationers.

On the whole, the probationers found the CSO placement a worthwhile experience. All parents indicated that the CSO scheme has done good for their children and their relationship with their children. All the agencies were also satisfied with the performance of the probationers. The CSO scheme as a condition of probation has been effective in meeting its 3 primary objectives and has provided the probationer with a different perspective of life.

*Prepared By  
Research & Statistics Unit  
Subordinate Courts*

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Research & Statistics Unit gratefully acknowledges the following for their assistance in this project :

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (MCD);  
REHABILITATION & PROTECTION DIVISION (MCD);  
THE COMMUNITY SERVICE UNIT (MCD);  
VOLUNTEER PROBATION OFFICERS (VPOs) AND  
SUBORDINATE COURT INTERPRETERS.

<sup>10</sup> Four breaches were recorded and these include three re-offences.  
(For details refer to the section on Survey Methodology)