



Volunteer Probation Officers in Japan

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Outline



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1. Basics of Volunteer Probation Officers (VPO) in Japan



VPOs are

1. Volunteers who are granted official status
2. Common citizens in a community



VPOs' main duties are to

1. Supervise and assist probationers and parolees
2. Coordinate the social circumstances of inmates
3. Promote crime prevention activities



- VPO conducts these duties and activities with the Probation Officer (PO)





2. The Numbers

In 2017

Probation and parole cases started = 32,538

Coordination of social circumstances cases started = 41,172

Probation Officers in the field = 959 (As of 1st April 2017)

On the other hand,

Volunteer Probation Officers (VPOs) = 47,641 (Capacity is 52,500)

(As of 1st January 2018)

The number of VPOs is much greater than the number of Probation Officers





3. The Advantages of VPOs

Now, there are about 47,600 VPOs and 1,000 POs in Japan.

 **Is the treatment by non-professional VPO appropriate?**

 **Yes. The treatment they provide is very important!**

Because there are several *advantages of VPOs*.

For example;

- ❖ Ability to take measures depending on the circumstances in the community.
- ❖ VPOs supervise offenders who live in the same community.
- ❖ POs and VPOs provide two unique perspectives on supervisees.
- ❖ It is easy for VPOs to learn new information about a supervisee.
- ❖ Easy accessibility to supervisees.





4. Historical Background of VPOs in Japan

The VPO concept originated in the Meiji Era (in 1888).

➤ **Before 1888**

In 1880, the first rehabilitation aid and instruction group was established by community volunteers, but it was abolished around 1902.

However, volunteers recognized that care was necessary for ex-prisoners.

➤ **1888 was the starting point of community involvement**

Volunteers established a company which gave ex-prisoners care; they raised funds from the community and **asked volunteers to counsel and support ex-prisoners.**

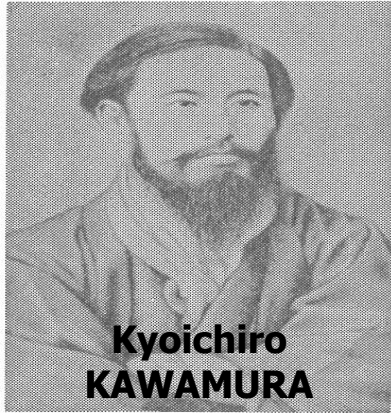
This company ran the first halfway house in Japan.



4. Historical Background of VPOs in Japan 2



Who thought about the necessity of support for offenders ?



An ex-prisoner: **Kyoichiro KAWAMURA**

“The circumstances of the prison were too vicious, so I would like to change them.”

...Later (in 1886), he became the vice warden of a prison.

As a vice warden, an ex-prisoner whom Kawamura had encouraged killed himself after release, because the community excluded him.

Mr. KAWAMURA knew an entrepreneur who became a partner and a patron to establish a company.

The entrepreneur: **Meizen KIMPARA**





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In Japan, the VPOs and the movement for inmates' reintegration and rehabilitation into the society were started by community volunteers.

The Japanese government **adopted VPOs as an official system** by legislation.

After WW2,

GHQ insisted that the **VPO system should be abolished**, because offenders treatment and community-based treatment should be conducted by "professionals"; however, the **VPO system has been sustained** to compensate for a shortage of probation officers.



5. VPO system is valuable, BUT...



There were **three big incidents**
by two supervisees and a former one.

1. Nara pref: An ex-parolee killed a girl and abandoned the corpse (2004).
2. Aichi pref: A parolee killed a baby and injured several persons (2005).
3. Aomori pref: A probationer confined several young women (2005).

After these incidents, the probation/parole supervision system was heavily criticized.

Probation officers had ***depended on VPOs too much!***





6. Response to the Criticism



In 2007, the law on community-based treatment was amended, redefining the roles of POs and VPOs.

- ❖ ***POs concentrate and have involvement with supervisees who have some difficulties in rehabilitation.***

Requires skills and specialized knowledge as a supervisor.

- ❖ ***The strength of VPOs is that they are community residents.***

Volunteer spirit and the gateway to the community.

However, the number of POs is insufficient, even after the amendment to clarify VPOs' tasks and responsibilities.

As a result, these ideas have **increased the importance of the VPOs' role.**

POs rely on the support of VPOs to supervise probationers and parolees.

This allows **POs to concentrate on the supervisees who require specialized support.**



7. Measures to Support VPOs

The Government has established several measures to reduce the burdens placed on VPOs and enhance recruitment.

1. VPO Internships
2. Offender Rehabilitation Support Centres
3. Multiple Responsibility System





Like POs, VPOs also function as probation supervisors in Japan.



Thank you very much for
your attention

