Marc Cerón, President of the European Organisation for Probation (CEP) visited the United States for the first time and joined us for our 38th Annual Training Institute in Baltimore, Maryland, July 28th –July 31st. During his visit, he shared with us the mission of CEP and its launching of the first World Congress on Probation, October 8-10th in London, England.

We sat down with President Cerón near the end of the Institute and he kindly allowed us to interview him further:

**President Cerón, it is truly an honor to host you on your first visit to the United States and first APPA Institute experience. Did you enjoy your first APPA conference?**

I was left very impressed with the conference because of the quality of the programming, the level of participation of the people, and the professionalism and commitment of everyone in probation and parole. The fact that participants came from all corners of the United States was very impressive. Really, the capacity of different experiences in the same space was such a positive act–all the experts in one place for APPA as a leader in our field was very special. From the moment I arrived, I felt completely supported, based on the following reasons: first, we speak the same language about our field, we face the same obstacles and have the same understanding of justice, and second, APPA members are friends. The sense of friendship I have felt has been marvelous. I was treated so well by everyone, from the Executive Board on. In this sense, I have been able to prove that APPA has the same passion as CEP.

**How were you introduced to APPA?**

CEP and APPA have a long tradition together. The Executive Staff of APPA attend the General Assembly of CEP and, in 2004 at the 8th General Assembly, the presidents of both organizations decided to sign a collaborative Memorandum of Understanding. Since then, the objective has been to develop concrete activities that formalize the agreement. Activities like
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information sharing, understanding, academia, collaboration that is mutually agreeable, and so on.

**How did you get involved in this field?**

I am a psychologist by trade and have always been curious about corrections and criminal justice. I became a member of an association through a friend in the field and had the good fortune of being contracted to work in a prison for 3 months in Catalonia, Spain. Truthfully what began as a 3-month contract turned into a 21-year career! It was the best decision of my professional life because, not only was I able to apply practical understanding of theories in academia, but I also learned of a whole world in which my knowledge expanded with other professionals who were committed to our field. Similar to many in the States, we tend to fall into this career and stay because we can not imagine our lives any other way.

**In your years of experience, what are the issues that are common in our field across both the UK and the U.S.?**

The primary problem in our system of corrections is that we have the benefit of rich evidence, but it is difficult to translate it to politics and institutions so that the criminal justice system can organize based on what we know. Evidence-based practice is difficult for some to accept. We know that the principle problem is to organize things the way we need to, but this involves challenging ideologies, emotions, etc. that have driven our field for years that is not based in evidence. What we know based on evidence obligates us to have the same goals and routes across the pond so that we are consistent in our practices and able to prove that there are efficient ways for resources and interventions to really work; to anticipate certain results. This is the main reason why we should collaborate as much as possible. There are prejudices that are difficult to overcome and this is why many in our field are still motivated by their gut or personal experience than by research. Interestingly, we are having the same conversation in Europe, perhaps at a different rate, but still the same.

**In what ways are we different?**

I was surprised as I overheard some participants here at the Institute discussing the fact that they carry a weapon. This is unimaginable in Europe because it changes the dynamic of probation. Here, carrying a weapon seems more a part of control, but in the UK, the vision is more about helping. What is interesting is that now the U.S. is moving more toward a helping model with the focus on EBP and the UK is considering options toward more control, so we are almost mirroring our movements in a form of convergences. We are talking about what works and how the evidence is useful for both groups.

**What are you taking with you from your visit with us?**

I’m taking a suitcase full of positives, experiences, enthusiasm, participation, refreshing ideas, and a clear vision that we are evolving, at least from different points, but reaching the same place. I look forward to future collaboration because it is necessary; we must take this promise
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seriously: to maximize our potential in both segments of the world. I truly thank everyone very much for your kindness, hospitality and friendship.

Marc Cerón is the President of the European Organisation for Probation (CEP). To European bodies such as the European Union and the Council of Europe, CEP is the spokesperson for the sector of probation, providing expertise and comparative data. It is therefore the voice of probation in ‘Brussels’. CEP is the abbreviation for 'Conférence Permanente Européenne de la Probation' and CEP was founded in 1981.

CEP aims to promote the social inclusion of offenders through community sanctions and measures such as probation, community service, mediation and conciliation. CEP is committed to enhance the profile of probation and to improve professionalism in this field, on a national and a European level. CEP therefore promotes pan-European cooperation by organising conferences on actual topics in probation. By making the reports of these events available, by publishing its digital newsletter and through this website, CEP stimulates the exchange of ideas on probation. In this way it makes an important contribution to the development of community sanctions and measures.

Its members are organisations working in the field of probation and interested individuals. CEP thus brings together practitioners, managers, academics, stakeholders and others working in the field of probation and criminal justice from all over Europe. Together they represent a unique network of expertise about positive ways of working with offenders in the community. Their common concern is how to protect society without resorting to the expense of prison.