

## B.C. Corrections best practices (and jokes !) exported to Latvia

### Chris Thomson

Britu Kolumbijas Likumpārskāpēju labošanas dienests/  
Britu Kolumbijas Tieslietu institūts (Kanāda)  
“Pamatinformācija par darbu ar dzimumnoziecniekiem”

What? Well you can recognize my name and below that it says British Columbia Corrections Branch and then Justice Institute of British Columbia and then the title of my sex offender training workshop, all in Latvian!

I was invited to go to Riga, Latvia for three weeks in October 2009 to deliver sex offender training to about 60 probation officers and local managers. This opportunity was enabled by Mike Simpson, Director of Corrections and Community Justice Division (JIBC) and Rob Watts, Provincial Director of Community Corrections and Corporate



View overlooking Riga, Latvia's capital city

Programs Division (Corrections Branch), who worked out the terms of my absence and coverage for me abroad. The training was three days long, repeated three times. All in all, I spent about 20 days in Latvia to complete the work.

Rob Watts has been regularly travelling to Latvia for about seven years. Rob provides training and consultation to their management staff about how we manage offenders in the community in B.C.

Imants Jurevičis is a smart young trilingual manager in the Latvian probation branch. He was one of the lead people seeking best practices to begin their probation supervision.

Latvia, having recently gained independence from Russia, wanted to design its own community supervision. Probation is only about three years old in Latvia. Prior to that, it was mostly incarceration with a rudimentary parole-like system for release. Latvians were impressed with our community risk assessment practices and sex offender training in British Columbia. Thus, a collaboration began.

Training in a foreign language was challenging—and fun. All my slides were translated into Latvian (jokes included!) and a translator named Tatyana sat beside me in the class of about 20 people. Although Tatyana normally wouldn't use sex offender terminology in her daily life, she



Chris surrounded by Latvian probation officers during a training session

quickly got used to it and we found a pace that worked for us.

I reminded her that she was getting paid to translate the 'bad words' so it wasn't like she voluntarily chose to say things like, penile plethysmograph. (Yes, you can Google it, just not at work.) You can imagine the visual I had to act out to make that particular term understandable. Translated into Latvian, it was pretty funny!

Latvia is a beautiful country with a sad and tragic history. It was twice occupied by the Russians and also by the Germans. In 1991, Latvians regained their independence and since then have worked hard at creating a new future. Their commitment to change includes a revamped criminal justice system. The fact that they sought out B.C. Corrections and JIBC to design their community supervision is truly a statement of the good work we do here and the international recognition we have received.

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