

Commonwealth Of Virginia Local Probation and Pretrial Evidence Based Practices

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Retrospective Evaluation Process

From November 2008 through February 2009, the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) conducted a baseline assessment of the implementation of Evidence-Based practice (EBP) in ten pilot sites.

- Blue Ridge Community Corrections
- OAR/Jefferson Area Community Corrections
- Colonial Community Corrections
- Piedmont Court Services
- Old Dominion Community Corrections/
Northwest Regional Adult Detention Center
- Chesterfield Community Corrections
- Rappahannock Community Corrections
- Henrico Community Corrections
- Lynchburg Community Corrections
- Hampton/Newport News Criminal Justice
Agency

The study included a review of related policy and practices, focus groups and interviews, and a review of the Pretrial Community Corrections (PTCC) case management system data. Systems in place to support the implementation of EBP were reviewed, and emphasis was placed on the components of CJI's Integrated Model: EBP, Organizational Development and Collaboration. This report is the first part of an Eighteen-month process to construct a Roadmap for the sustainable implementation and replication of Evidence-Based practices (EBP) in local probation and pretrial sites across the Commonwealth.

The retrospective study was designed to answer three main questions:

1. *How are Evidence-Based practices operating within the ten pilot sites?*
2. *Is Evidence-Based practice being implemented as intended within each pilot site?*
3. *What has the organization learned from the implementation of the strategic plan?*

CJI began the study process by interviewing key personnel in the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the pilot sites. Policy and procedures were reviewed, including Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), guidelines, reporting and committee work. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with all levels of staff within the pilot sites and the DCJS to gather lessons learned and overall feedback on the implementation of EBP in the pilot sites. Electronic data was also reviewed to understand changes in client services before and after implementation of EBP began.

Please see the full retrospective study for more information about the methodology, including sampling procedures, a schedule of interviews and focus groups conducted, a list of questions asked the participants, and the guidelines used to review data and other documentation.

Format

The format for the Executive Summary is detailed below. First, CJI will provide a general interpretation of the information gathered and list common themes from participant feedback. These themes are discussed in terms of strengths and areas of improvement. Based on that feedback, the lessons learned and ideas for moving forward are summarized. Recommendations for consideration are then provided in four priority areas: (a) Training; (b) Quality Assurance; (c) Standards, Policy, and Procedures; and (d) Organizational Development and Collaboration. The recommendations are intended as suggested elements to be addressed in the development of the Roadmap.

Interpretation of Findings

The mission of the Department of Criminal Justice Services is to “provide comprehensive planning and state of the art technical and support services for the criminal justice system to improve and promote public safety in the Commonwealth”. In order to fulfill that mission DCJS partnered with the Virginia Community Criminal Justice Association (VCCJA) to create a plan entitled *Action Plan for Implementing Legal and Evidence-Based practices* in 2006. This is referred to as the departmental strategic plan throughout the report. The overall goal of this plan is “To effectively implement Evidence-Based practices for both the pretrial and post convicted populations handled through local probation agencies in the State of Virginia”.

For many years, DCJS and VCCJA have willingly been taking deliberate and thoughtful steps toward reducing recidivism and improving public safety in Virginia. To guide the EBP effort, an EBP Steering Committee was formed in 2006. This group has been charged with providing direction to EBP implementation within ten pilot sites, developing a strategic plan, disseminating information to supervisors and line staff regarding EBP, and continually monitoring the goals and objectives in the strategic plan. This committee currently consists of the ten EBP pilot site directors, DCJS representatives, supervisors, case managers, and probation and pretrial officers. This committee is an example of the strong collaboration between DCJS and VCCJA.

Since 2006 ten pilot sites have been following this strategic approach and an EBP Coordinator Liaison has been hired by DCJS to encourage and support the adoption of EBP in local agencies.

Throughout the evaluation period staff from DCJS and the pilot sites’ commitment to EBP and public safety in Virginia was unmistakable. “The enthusiasm for implementing EBP was readily apparent and much has been accomplished.”

Common Themes

Strengths

Planning

- The *Action Plan for Implementing Legal and Evidence-Based practices* identified core goals for local probation and pretrial services across sites.
- The goals of this plan focus on actuarial risk assessment, differential supervision, violation procedures, client engagement, targeted services, community support and several measures of quality, including data driven decision making, information technology, quality assurance and fidelity, and evaluation of effectiveness.
- Identification of these core goals signifies leadership understands the significant effort associated with implementing EBP. Moreover, it shows the motivation and willingness to take on significant organizational change.
- Some sites have conducted local strategic planning as part of the EBP implementation process which has enhanced implementation efforts within these sites.

The Pilot Process

- The pilot sites made significant progress in several core goal areas.
- Risk assessments have been implemented and most have been validated.
- Training and boosters have occurred in several areas of EBP (e.g., Risk Assessment and Motivational Interviewing).
- Guidelines have been created for triaging cases according to assessed risk levels. (e.g. *DCJS Guideline Determining Supervision Levels and Overrides*).
- Some stakeholders are engaged in the process and have supported the changes in practice.
- The EBP implementation process is being documented in various formats.
- Quality assurance processes have begun to take shape.
- The sites have started to address organizational development (e.g. EBP consistent strategic planning and hiring practices).
- Many staff has commented on the positive change in their office cultures.
- The process allowed flexibility across diverse sites (e.g., rural and urban).
- Implementing EBP through the pilot process allowed for learning to occur and adjustments to be made based on that learning. Through these efforts the sites have built a strong foundation for EBP.

Collaborative Leadership

- The support of DCJS and VCCJA leadership provided a collaborative forum for the EBP Steering Committee to exchange ideas and guide implementation efforts.
- The EBP Coordinator acts as a conduit for information dissemination between local and state level stakeholders. The coordinator is there to inform, support and encourage voluntary change efforts by local agencies.
- Accomplishments across the ten sites are a result of the efforts made by the steering committee, subcommittees and staff that have pushed full steam ahead into EBP.

Motivation for Effectiveness

- The DCJS and pilot site staff are clearly committed to reducing recidivism and have worked very hard toward this end. The steps taken by the EBP Steering Committee are clearly intended to bring about reductions in recidivism.
- Staff at all levels expressed a desire to be skilled and proficient in their work.
- A strong desire exists to understand the strategic plan and rationale behind EBP implementation activities.
- All levels of staff would like to understand goals for the overall implementation of EBP and be able to monitor progress toward those goals and recidivism outcomes.
- Staff would like more communication about EBP issues and are motivated by involvement in the decision making process.

Areas for Improvement

Documentation

- The documentation of EBP practices has been accomplished through various memos, forms, emails and committee guidelines. A complete manual for EBP does not yet exist. This creates unclear or unknown expectations which can make managing the change process difficult. A manual can serve as the foundation upon which all practice is based.

Communicating Connections

- Staff can become overwhelmed by daily requirements and many simultaneous activities and initiatives. It is important to continually reinforce the connection between daily work and implementing EBP. Otherwise, it is often seen as a series of tasks rather than part of a philosophical shift in the way local probation and pretrial agencies do business.
- A comprehensive training curriculum for EBP has not been fully developed or consistently applied for all levels of staff. Training has been somewhat fragmented and perceived by many as something to “complete”. Systematic training can be seen as an ongoing professional development plan for building competency and proficiency in EBP.
- Sustaining EBP requires an internal capacity to provide training and booster sessions for new and existing staff. The integration of training, quality assurance and human resources practices can reinforce organizational priorities.
- The strategic plan, mission and vision for EBP implementation has not been communicated throughout implementation activities. Not all sites have a strategic plan which includes EBP and its related components. Involving staff at all levels in this process can facilitate buy-in and ownership of strategic goals.
- The connection between the work of each committee and steering committee is not clearly recognizable. Often, staff follow through on work done by these committees (as they understand the instructions) without understanding how it pertains to the larger picture.
- Evidence-Based practice communication; education and engagement have primarily been conducted internally with varying degrees of external stakeholder involvement at state and local levels. The disconnect between EBP efforts and external stakeholders at local and state levels can significantly hinder implementation efforts by staff at all levels.

Fidelity and Quality

- The logic model created by the QA committee includes many activities and expected outcomes that the sites have begun to implement. As implementation processes varied between sites, the extent to which these outcomes were achieved is a matter for discussion.
- The use of data has yet to be maximized. Data at the individual officer, unit, site and statewide levels are necessary to make Evidence-Based decisions, maintain fidelity to EBP principles, and identify areas for continuous improvement.

- The plans for quality assurance and evaluation have not been consistently implemented or comprehensively integrated into brief summary reports (often called dashboard measures). Regular quality assurance to insure fidelity and periodic evaluation are necessary to continually address and provide feedback on the efficacy of EBP.

Lessons Learned

- A change in core business practices it is never simple. Change takes time, energy, effort, communication, dedication, creativity and collaboration. There are inevitable struggles that occur during execution. In most instances, not all obstacles will be recognized until they are experienced.
- Sites adapted implementation and quality assurance strategies to meet specific local needs as necessary. The variation between the intent of the EBP Steering Committee and subcommittees was often lost in translation.
- Multi-directional communication is necessary to sustain and integrate EBP into daily practices and achieve long term goals. Staff at all levels must have a voice in the process. Sites where staff had the opportunity to give input and receive feedback seemed to be more invested in the process. Whereas, in sites where communication was received as more of a top – down directive staff seemed to be more disconnected from the process.
- Communication and collaboration are vitally important both internally and externally. Stakeholders in the local communities and at the state level are important partners in achieving recidivism reduction.
- Another important lesson learned is the need for enhanced internal capacity to sustain EBP. Building internal capacity to address client needs, consistently train staff, perform quality assurance and conduct evaluation is core to becoming Evidence-Based organizations. Developing this capacity would assist in integrating EBP into daily activities and allow sites to improve public safety and reduce recidivism without dependence on grants or outside assistance.
- Directors and supervisors are in unique positions to model a learning culture. Many are learning new skills right alongside line staff. Supervisors and Directors have had to simultaneously manage change, become proficient in EBP skills, mentor and develop staff and model the change desired. Additional training for supervisors and directors would have helped them to better support staff.

Moving Forward

- As with any endeavor it takes time and experience to fine tune all the parts. It is also easy to lose sight of the Collaboration and Organizational Development (OD) circles of the Integrated Model while everyone is working so hard on the EBP circle.
- Sites have made varying efforts into OD and Collaboration. As the focus becomes more balanced among the three components, the sites will be able to continue moving forward in a more comprehensive manner.
- The variation between sites is something to consider as new sites come on board. As EBP spreads across the state it will be important to have consistency in certain areas to be able to evaluate effectiveness and demonstrate continuous quality improvement, while at the same time taking local needs into account. In moving forward it will be important to be clear about roles, distinguish differences between suggestions and guidelines, and clearly articulate local and DCJS requirements.
- There are some important areas of improvement that apply to all sites. Building internal capacity for training, provision of services that address client needs, quality assurance and evaluation will help improve consistency and outcome.
- Use the eight principles of EBP to connect the dots both internally and externally. For example, the use of MI and staff's role in behavior change can evolve as case planning becomes more embedded. There can be more of a focus on addressing criminogenic needs as assessment information is more readily understood, discussed and applied through case planning and the provision of services.
- A comprehensive QA and CQI plan for EBP can help to identify priorities, reduce redundancies and encourage buy-in. Defining core data elements, measures, and processes that can be consistent across sites offer a way of gathering data and evaluating effectiveness.
- Using the data as a tool for providing regular feedback can remind staff and stakeholders of local probation and pretrial's commitment to EBP. Discussing data and working towards continuous quality improvement helps to provide a connection to all components of implementing EBP and encourage multi-directional communication. Data is an important tool to encourage alignment with EBP principles, develop staff proficiencies, address client needs, collaborate with stakeholders and celebrate successes.

- The value of gathering data and using it to make decisions will be helpful in moving forward. Similarly, use of the data supplied in this study will provide opportunities for implementation improvement. The foundation for EBP has been poured and the sites are on their way to becoming Evidence-Based organizations.

Following a review of the findings the Roadmap Development process will begin. The information learned from this study will be the basis for moving forward. A work plan will be developed collaboratively with DCJS to determine areas where CJI can be most helpful and effective. The suggested plans for development of the Roadmap include the recommendations in Table 1.

Table 1 represents the key recommendations made in this report.

Category	Key Recommendations
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Develop comprehensive Training Curricula for all levels of staff; ❖ Reinforce the comprehensive process involved when implementing EBP throughout all training processes; ❖ Integrate EBP training into ongoing professional development plans for all levels of staff; ❖ Increase internal capacity in each site to deliver initial and booster training;
Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Implement Quality Assurance and Continuous Quality Improvement Plans; ❖ Provide a comprehensive vision to “Connect the Dots” through the Eight Evidence-Based Principles; ❖ Increase internal capacity for evaluation and analysis; ❖ Exercise data driven decision making at all levels of the agencies;
Standards, Policy, Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Enhance infrastructure and communication between committees and across sites; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Synthesize implementation efforts ○ Open lines of communication ❖ Create an EBP operation/implementation manual for all sites; ❖ Determine what core elements and processes should be consistent across all sites; ❖ Work with DCJS to expedite policy approval processes related to EBP;
Organizational Development and Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Enhance communication within and across sites; ❖ Apply organizational assessment and strategic planning procedures locally; ❖ Institute client satisfaction assessment processes; ❖ Increase capacity to address client risks and needs through comprehensive case planning, programs and services; ❖ Enhance stakeholder collaboration and education at state and local levels.

Conclusion

There are many benefits to the implementation of EBP in local probation and pretrial agencies across Virginia. Reinforcing the link between Evidence-Based practices, quality assurance and data driven decision making is a worthwhile goal for all agencies undertaking EBP implementation. While the EBP Steering Committee and EBP Coordinator have been key assets to this initiative expansion to additional sites will require creative use of resources. The sheer volume of sites and effort required to fully integrate EBP into daily practices in each of these sites makes it challenging to manage. The responsibility for recidivism reduction cannot fall on a handful of committee members alone, it must be shared by everyone. Clear identification of roles and responsibilities for all levels of staff (e.g. state and local level) will assist in creating shared vision and ownership for truly becoming Evidence-Based organizations. In moving forward it will be important to maintain a realistic implementation plan that allows for thorough and thoughtful implementation of new practices over a multi-year period.

