

BLACKFORD COUNTY COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS/BLACKFORD COUNTY PROBATION

Reducing Recidivism

Blackford County Efforts to Reduce Recidivism

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A three year study has been conducted to monitor and report on the effectiveness of Evidence Based Practices within Blackford County by determining the recidivism rates on individuals assigned to probation and/or community corrections programs.

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Introduction

"In order to evaluate social service in the field of delinquency, it is necessary to check up the service from time to time. It is well to ascertain what results are achieved toward the readjustment in the community of the handicapped individuals who we commonly call 'social misfits', (Menken, 1924). Therefore, in an effort to determine the effectiveness of local evidence based programming on offenders in Blackford County, a three-year study has been conducted to compare the rates of recidivism between those who received evidence based practice programming and those who have not. The data was collected matching offenses, basic risk assessment and level of offenses against those who have successfully completed specific programming and those who have not. This paper will outline the programming provided to individuals based upon their *risk*, and the programs to which they have been assigned. In an effort to understand the totality of the situation facing the judicial system in Blackford County a foundation for the need for this study is outlined as well as the progression which has led to the change in attitudes and activities associated with the supervision and efforts at rehabilitation. Many other projects of research have helped define the need for localized community based programming to aid in reducing the rate of recidivism. As noted, "the greatest reductions in recidivism are often associated with community-based programs, not programs found in institutional settings," (Rhine, 2002).

Background

Beginning in 2003, efforts began within the Blackford County Community Corrections Department and the Blackford County Probation Department re-analyzing the programs and methods in which offenders were served. Based on historical knowledge of recidivism and the classifications of offenders that were often dealt with, little progress was being made to reduce an individual's likelihood to return to the criminal justice system. While the continuum of sanctions within the judicial system

clearly increased supervision based on the return to the criminal justice system, many offenders were classified and categorized based on a rudimentary risk classification system. As a result it was determined, inaccurately, that those who presented a higher risk to reoffend were automatically destined to return to supervision in the future. Conversely, those at a lower risk were categorized as having the potential to return and were thrust into specified programming. However, changes within the criminal justice community led to an overhaul of the current system and provided a glimpse of hope that an offender's likelihood to re-offend could be dramatically reduced. Efforts were then made to accurately understand risk and the factors that increase an individual's risk as well as those factors that can reduce risk.

Assumptions:

A host of studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of Evidence Based Practices, or those practices which are supported by sound scientific documentation outlining their effectiveness and proven success. While the results of those surveys are independent of the present study, there is a need to compare localized results to those national surveys conducted and analyzed. In January, 2006 a national survey was conducted comparing multiple programs and their success/failure over a 35 year period. Results of that survey notes that a variety of factors contribute to an individual's likelihood to re-offend. Most notably it was found that those programs which provided intensive supervision coupled with treatment-oriented programs, proved to reduce the rates of recidivism far better than those programs which did not offer both in combination, (Aos, Miller, & Drake, January, 2006).

While it is the focus and direction of local resources to reduce the likelihood that an individual will re-offend, it is necessary to investigate and research the likelihood that a program may increase the risk to re-offend. Such research has been conducted and analyzed through multiple sources. The

findings of these studies have concluded that placing low-risk offenders in programs designed for high-risk offenders actually will increase the rates of recidivism for this population. "Research has indicated that intensive treatment and supervision for low-risk offenders has increased this population's recidivism rates," (Andrews D. , Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990). Therefore, there is an apparent association with a person's risk/needs and their likelihood to re-offend. This further supports the need to closely match the offender with specific needs and risk.

Reducing Recidivism

"National recidivism rates are staggering; 2/3 of inmates will be re-arrested within three years of their release," (Moll, 2006). A recent study by the Indiana Department of Correction indicates that approximately 1/3 of all State Inmates will return to the Indiana Department of Correction within the same time period. (Garner, 2008). In an effort to reduce costs associated with incarceration in addition to secondary costs of criminal behavior within Blackford County, great care and consideration has been given to ensure that the correctional opportunities are in place to effectively reduce the rates of recidivism among offenders. Changes in policies and procedures over the past three years have allowed for additional *Evidence Based Practices* to be utilized with offenders in the Blackford County Criminal Justice System. It is the overall goal of these programs to reduce the rates of recidivism while preparing offenders for re-entry into society with the social tools necessary to be successful and productive members of society. "Eventually, 93% of all inmates are released back to their communities," (Dennehy, 2006, December). Therefore, it is necessary to do everything possible to make sure that a substantial number of these individuals do not return to criminal behaviors, especially when evidence can support the reduction of recidivism by the implementation of specific programming.

Risk/Need Principle

Much research and discussion has been conducted in the field of Criminal Justice to determine the best method for determining the appropriate levels of supervision and programming for offenders. Most notably, Andrews (1990) notes, "the risk principle suggests that higher levels of service are best reserved for higher risk cases and that low-risk cases are best assigned to minimal service," (Andrews D. , Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990). Furthering this assumption, these factors are classified into two sub-categories; static and dynamic. Dynamic risk factors, those which we can change, are outlined as an individual's *criminogenic needs*. Since a person's dynamic risk factors can be changed, the assumption remains that risk can be lowered by correction those dynamic factors which increase risk. Conversely, static factors are those which we cannot change. As noted, "static factors, (i.e., age, previous convictions) are aspects of the offender's past that are predictive of recidivism but cannot be changed," (Andrews & Bonta, *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*, 1994). Finding the dynamic factors and associating them with the needs of the individual has proved to be successful in reducing rates of recidivism by correcting potentially damaging behaviors that increase risk.

"The most effective programs target such dynamic risk factors as antisocial attitudes, values and beliefs, delinquent and criminal peers, self-control, self-management, and problem solving skills," (Rhine, 2002). While it is necessary to classify individuals into categories based on risk, it is inherently important to associate the risk based on an individual's need as outlined. Otherwise, the risk classification is meaningless. Many of these dynamic factors help uncover certain social deficiencies that offenders possess. Simply incarcerating or programming individuals without addressing these social deficiencies will ensure their return to the criminal justice system. The revolving pattern of behaviors can closely be tied to their antisocial activities. Basing a risk assessment with the inclusion of these dynamic factors has proven to be successful in rehabilitation for these offenders.

Assessment Tools

Presently two forms of assessments are conducted in Blackford County with offenders. The Indiana Judicial Center Caseload and Classification System of risk is utilized and reported through the Blackford County Probation Department as required by the Indiana Judicial Center. However, this assessment alone provides little measurable support of an individual's dynamic risk factors as noted. In addition, recent changes in policy and procedure utilize the Level of Service Inventory, Revised (LSI-R) assessment on all criminal cases wherein the defendant is sentenced to a term of probation and/or placement in the community corrections programs. This step allows the probation officers and the community corrections officers the ability to tailor programming to the individual needs of the client and thus matching their risks to programs available thereby identifying and addressing their social deficiencies. The LSI-R tool was developed based on the research noted herein and is now a standard tool in the criminal justice sector to classify risk and needs of offenders. A basic comparison indicates that the two tools utilized presently in Blackford County are similar in risk result levels based on categories of *high, medium, low*, but are administered differently and measure different risk factors. Specifically, the LSI-R assessment provides more of the dynamic risk factors of the individual and is more detailed in the results found. However, the basic evaluations yield similar results and have been determined to be acceptable for their use in this study.

Cost/Benefit Factor

"It is smart to prepare offenders to return to society as law-abiding citizens. If they do not, we all pay, either directly as victims or indirectly as taxpayers," (Dennehy, 2006, December). In 2001 the Bureau of Justice Statistics notes that "the average annual operating cost per State inmate was \$22,650, or \$62.50 per day," (Stephan, June 2004). The average cost in the State of Indiana in 2007 is \$52.61 per day. (2007 Annual Report , 2007). The daily cost associated inmates at the Blackford County Security Center is estimated to be \$32.24 per day. It is therefore, necessary to provide services and support to

individuals to reduce the likelihood that they will return to incarceration, thereby increasing the costs associated with their incarceration. Based on average daily populations of clients in community correction programs and probation supervision, the average daily cost is \$7.33 per day per client for Community Corrections programs and \$0.87 per day for probation services. This clearly outlines the up-front cost savings to local taxpayers by utilizing alternative sentencing options and providing evidence based practice services outside the confines of the Blackford County Security Center and/or the Indiana Department of Corrections.

Data Sets

The first comparative data set included those individuals who attended and successfully completed the Thinking for a Change Program and their activities the following three year period. A rate of recidivism was established and compared to those who did not receive the programming. While it is the goal to look at the entire change in programming within the Blackford County Judicial System, the common notable difference in data sets is the Thinking for a Change Program. In most cases, this program was implemented in addition to other previously required programs, (i.e. Counseling, Electronic Home Detention, GED, etc.).

For the purpose of this study recidivism is defined as:

"an individual who, within a three year period of time commits additional criminal acts similar in nature to the originating offense within Blackford County and the contiguous counties of Jay, Grant, Wells and Delaware . "

Lastly a comparative study will further analyze the client's criminal activities as they pertain to other offenses which are not similar in nature. It is the goal of this study to provide meaningful results based on four years of change and evolution for the Blackford County Community Corrections and

Blackford County Probation Departments; the cohesive working environment, and the efforts of the departments to identify and utilize programs that can and do make changes in individual's behaviors.

Evaluation

Individuals referred to evidence based practice programs within the past four years have been included in this study and tracked for a period of three years to determine the effectiveness of the programming and methods of supervision. The basis of the study included individuals who successfully completed programs to individuals who did not complete similar programming. Primary areas of concern for this study are to measure the effectiveness of programs which are matched to the offender's criminogenic needs. This study has measured success based on offenders who do not re-offend with similar offense for which they have received treatment. For those individuals who commit subsequent offenses different in nature to the initial offense, may not have received programs or treatment matching that particular need.

For the purpose of establishing a baseline of recidivism in Blackford County a random draw of 100 clients was pulled and evaluated on a one and three year interval. This baseline can then be compared to the current statistics of those individuals (55) who have been ordered to participate in evidence based programming, specifically the Thinking for a Change Program. An additional 55 clients were then selected based on similar offenses and similar risks assessment scores who were not required to participate in the programming. It was necessary to develop these three groups of individuals to further examine the impact of new policies and individualized case planning regardless of evidence based practice programs.

Results

At the local level, comparisons have been made with current evidence based practices compared to those prior to the implementation of these practices. For the purpose of understanding the outlying impact of the programs, data has been collected and measured to include cross comparisons for offenses of any type as well as offenses committed that are similar in nature. As noted the data has been closely matched based on offense and risk and whether or not they completed the Thinking for a Change Program, an identified Evidence Based Program. This is independent of any additional Court sanctions and is the leading differentiating practice at this time relative to the Evidence Based Practice programming changes. The initial set of comparison data represents those clients served prior to the implementation of any Evidence Based Programming and individualized service programming.

Committed new offense regardless of type:

Prior to Implementation (100 random clients):

Within 1 year: 34.4% committed a new criminal offense.

Within 3 years: 50.5% committed a new criminal offense.

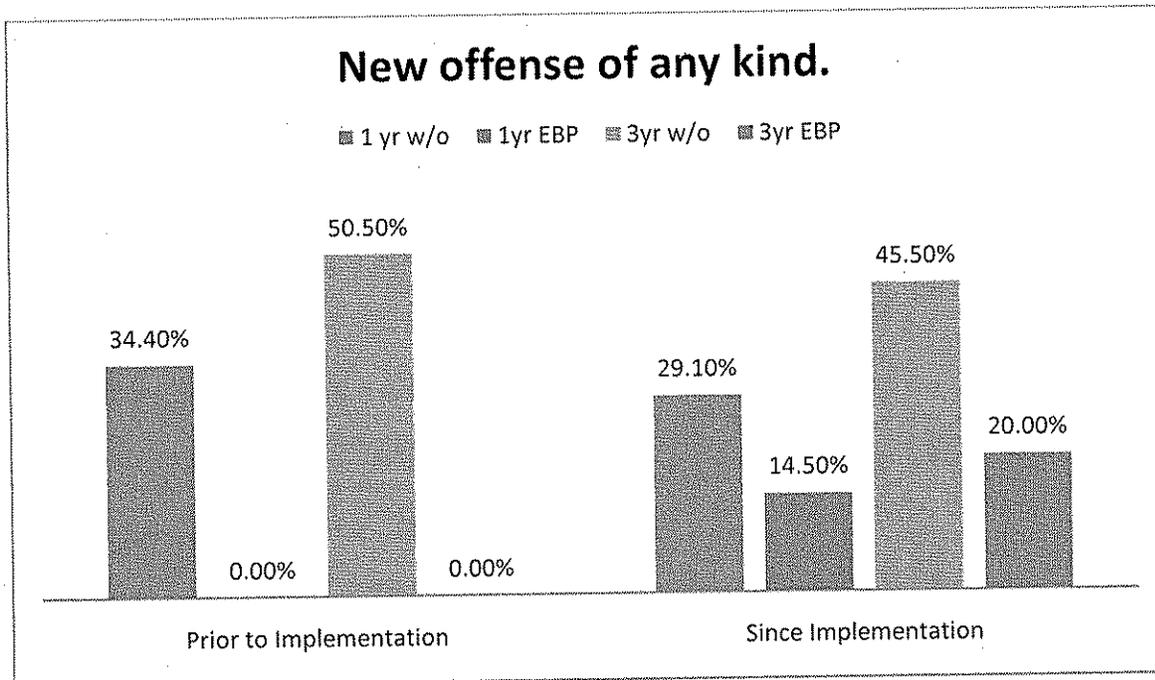
Since Implementation (55 clients):

Within 1 year w/o evidence based programs: 29.1% Committed new offense.

Within 1 year with evidence based programs: 14.5%

Within 3 years w/o EBP: 45.5%

Within 3 years with EBP: 20.0%



Committed new offense of like kind:

Prior to Implementation (100 random clients):

Within 1 year: 21.5% committed a new criminal offense.

Within 3 years: 32.25% committed a new criminal offense.

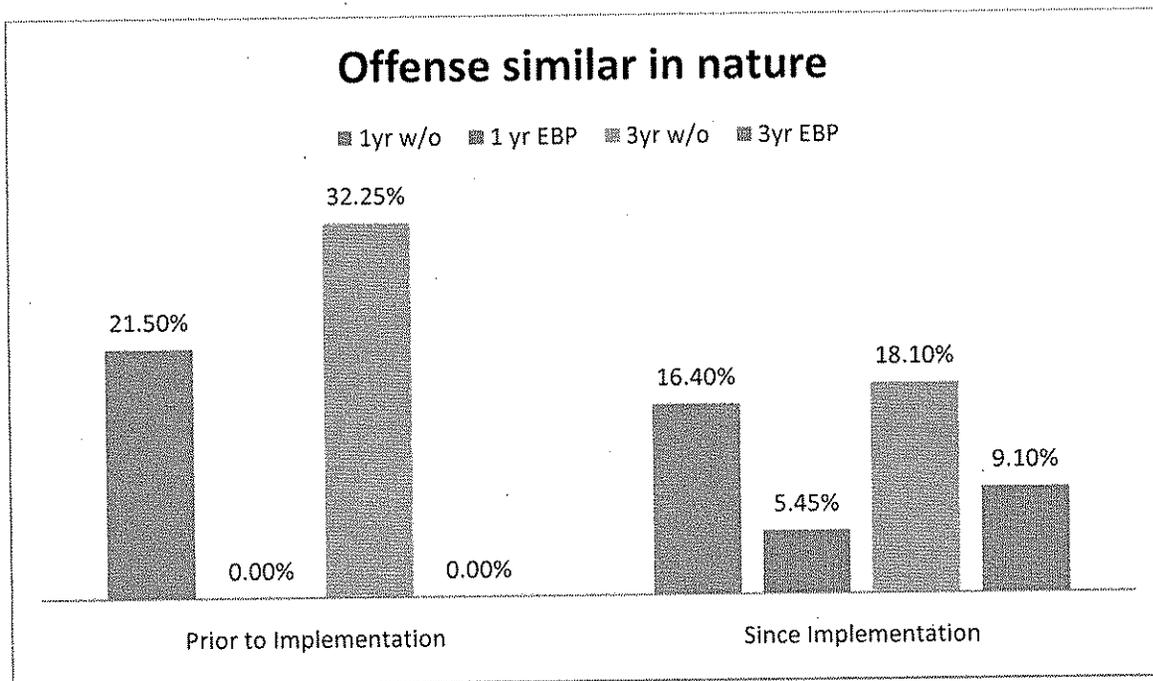
Since Implementation (55 clients):

Within 1 year w/o evidence based programs: 16.4% Committed new offense.

Within 1 year with evidence based programs: 5.45%

Within 3 years w/o EBP: 18.1%

Within 3 years with EBP: 9.1%



Conclusion

In short, the programs and tools implemented within the Blackford County Judicial System are working. The results noted above speak for themselves and are now a solid basis and justification for continued work in the area of Evidence Based Programming. Ensuring that programs meet the need of the individual is critical to the continued success of the judicial system. The potential exists to decrease expenses associated with incarceration of these individuals over a substantial period of time due to their decreased patterns of criminal behavior. These results also show that the mere changes of individualized case management for these individuals can slightly reduce the likelihood that they will reoffend, but not to the significance of implementing evidence based practices.

Efforts continue to be made in the area of additional program implementation. At the time of this writing, steps are being made to implement *Prime for Life* as well as other individualized case management programs to ensure that the dynamic risk factors are being addressed to further support and reduce the rates of recidivism. Clients are now being evaluated utilizing the LSI-R assessment tool to prepare and utilize individualized case management protocol in an effort to identify the most critical areas of need for the individual. Addressing these critical needs first is now a top priority in an effort to continue the reduction of recidivism rates for Blackford County.

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