

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *The Importance of Staff Practice in Delivering Effective Correctional Treatment*

Dowden, C. and Andrews, D.A. 2004. *The Importance of Staff Practice in Delivering Effective Correctional Treatment: A Meta-Analytic Review of Core Correctional Practice*. International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology 48(2):203-214.

**Key Words:** meta-analysis, risk, need, responsivity, recidivism, therapeutic alliance, correctional practices

### Summary/Conclusions

Using a meta-analytic approach, the researchers explored if certain staff case management skills were associated with the reduction of recidivism in correctional populations. Specifically, the analysis examined the effectiveness of core correctional practices (CCP). CCP is an approach which relies on five components in the treatment and case management of offenders. "These five dimensions include effective use of authority, anticriminal modeling and reinforcement, problem solving, use of community resources, and quality of interpersonal relationships between staff and client." Results were positive, albeit, limited.

### Limitations of Information

As with all meta-analyses, the results are dependent on the strength of the studies used to calculate the results. In this analysis, the "CCP's were rarely used in the human services programs that were surveyed." As a result, the N of studies on which some variables were based was relatively small compared to the total of 273 samples used in the analysis.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

## **The Effectiveness of Core Correctional Practices**

There has been a large number of studies conducted on the effectiveness of programs that engage the Risk, Need, and Responsivity principles to reduce recidivism. However, there have been few studies that have examined the best practices for staff to utilize these principles and deliver correctional interventions.

The idea of core correctional practice (CCP) was developed over 20 years ago. Designed to increase the potential effectiveness of interventions and based on social learning theory, CCP is composed of five dimensions: "effective use of authority, anticriminal modeling and reinforcement, problem solving, use of community resources, and quality of interpersonal relationships between staff and client." The researchers hypothesized that programs that used the CCP techniques would have better outcomes than those that didn't.

The meta-analysis was conducted with 273 tests out of the human services literature. In brief, the five components of CCP were defined as:

1. Effective use of authority: Staff use a "firm-but-fair" approach;
2. Appropriate modeling and reinforcement: Staff demonstrate behavior and reward client adherence. Staff provide effective disapproval and use a structured learning process;
3. Problem solving: Staff assisted clients in goal setting, evaluating options, and implementing plans;
4. Effective use of community resources: Staff advocate for clients in the community (i.e.: at work, school);

5. Quality of interpersonal relationships: Staff has rapport with clients and use skilled communication.

The study found that these techniques are not used frequently in corrections. However, where they were used, almost all of the techniques were associated positively and significantly with the reduction of recidivism. Further noted, CCP has the largest effects when used in programs that also adhered to the principles of Risk, Need, and Responsivity.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Build rapport and develop respectful, empathic relationships with clients using MI skills.
- ✓ Use authority effectively, keeping attention on the behavior rather than the client and administering firm, but fair, reinforcement and consequences.
- ✓ Build skills in individual appointments by defining and modeling a skill for the client, having the client role play the skill, providing immediate feedback on performance, and assigning homework.
- ✓ Help offenders to clearly identify problems, then use case plans to set a goal, develop options, and choose an appropriate action.
- ✓ Consider these ways to address antisocial behavior: use role plays to model desirable behavior; use Carey Guides to teach new skills; explore with the client why a behavior is not pro-social.
- ✓ Adhere to the principles of Risk, Need, and Responsivity.