

**JUVENILE JUSTICE
EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES IN
RURAL COMMUNITIES**



**CHALLENGES AND
SOLUTIONS**

The following report was compiled by The Carey Group for the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission and the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers as part of the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy. The purpose of this "white paper" is to provide guidance to rural counties seeking to overcome rural-based barriers to implementing evidence-based practices, as described in the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy Monograph.

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OVERVIEW

Juvenile justice organizations around the world are moving to align their programs and services with what has come to be known as evidence-based practices (EBP). Originating in the medical profession, EBP asserts that public policy and practice should be based on the best available scientific evidence in order to effectively achieve stated goals and efficiently use taxpayers' dollars. Failure to match services to rigorous, evidentiary standards not only makes poor use of limited public funds but can even lead to an exacerbation of the problems and issues that government seeks to resolve. In the juvenile justice context, research has demonstrated that the proper implementation of EBP can lead to significant reductions in juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

In June 2010, with the five-year commitment of the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change (MfC) juvenile justice reform initiative drawing to a close, the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers and Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) staff agreed, at their annual strategic planning meeting, that a new Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES) was needed, both to consolidate the gains of the previous five years "under one roof" and to develop strategies to sustain and enhance those efforts. Pennsylvania's JJSES rests on two interlinked foundations: the best empirical research available in the field of juvenile justice and a set of core beliefs about how to put this research into practice.

The Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy corresponds closely to the principles of balanced and restorative justice (BARJ). JJSES's statement of purpose is the following:

We dedicate ourselves to working in partnership to enhance the capacity of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system to achieve its balanced and restorative justice mission by

- enhancing the capacity of our juvenile justice system to achieve its balanced and restorative justice mission through the implementation of evidence-based practices
- demonstrating an ongoing commitment to data collection, analysis, and research
- demonstrating a commitment to continuous quality improvement in every aspect of the system.¹

¹ This statement of purpose was taken from the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy Monograph developed for Pennsylvania by the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

Juvenile justice interventions and programs are considered effective when they reduce a youth's risk to reoffend. In this context, the application of evidence-based practices translates directly into enhanced public safety. Research over the last two decades is both clear and compelling regarding those interventions that result in reduced recidivism. Juvenile justice agencies in Pennsylvania must adopt the principles of EBP in order to achieve their stated mission of repairing harm to victims, restoring the health and welfare of communities, and enabling delinquent youth to become productive and law-abiding members of society.

JJSES laid out four distinct implementation stages: readiness, initiation, behavioral change, and refinement. Each stage included a proposed set of activities that, if implemented with fidelity, would enhance the risk reduction objectives sought by the JJSES model. However, there are 67 counties in Pennsylvania, each of which operates a juvenile probation system independently from other counties. Many of those counties are rural and experience different and sometimes more stubborn implementation challenges than their counterparts in suburban and urban areas. To help address some of these challenges, a Rural Summit was held on October 17, 2013, at the Pennhills Club in Bradford, PA. The Summit was sponsored by the McKean County Juvenile Probation Department, with financial support from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. Its purpose was to:

- Isolate and discuss the issues and strengths that are unique to rural counties in EBP implementation;
- Discover what others have done to overcome these challenges; and
- Develop a white paper to assist rural areas in implementing EBP.

Juvenile justice stakeholders from Class 6, 7, and 8 Pennsylvania counties were invited to the daylong Summit. In preparation for the Summit, representatives from each invited county were given a three-question survey. The results of this survey were used to prepare the agenda for the Summit. In addition, two juvenile justice leaders from states with rural jurisdictions that were successful in implementing evidence-based practices were invited to share their experiences and help facilitate breakout sessions. These breakout sessions were divided into three topic areas that were identified in the surveys to be of greatest concern in successfully implementing EBP. Those challenges (and the report format) were as follows:

1. Stakeholder participation and collaboration;
2. Implementation difficulties by probation staff; and
3. Limitation of local resources and services.

Participants were urged to share their successes in overcoming these challenges and to brainstorm potential solutions to what are commonly referred to as “stubborn issues.” As such, it was recognized that there are no easy fixes.

The following contains a “discussion” of the issues and solutions based on the experiences of rural areas in Pennsylvania and other states, including but not limited to Wisconsin and Utah. It should be noted that a number of the issues and solutions are not unique to rural communities and juvenile justice stakeholders. They were, nonetheless, frequently reported as areas of concern. It is hoped that readers will discover a number of solutions to these challenges that could be applied in their local area.

CHALLENGE ONE: STAKEHOLDER CHALLENGES

The juvenile justice system relies on effective collaboration between court personnel, probation, victim services, and community-based organizations (schools, human/mental health/substance abuse service providers, etc.). When the system and its partners are not working in concert toward common goals, those who are served by the system suffer. In some cases, applying evidence-based practices can challenge long-held views and practices and be met with skepticism. In other cases, the juvenile justice system and its partners possess a service delivery culture that is highly consistent with EBP goals and processes. Nonetheless, survey and forum responses indicated that, in many cases, stakeholder challenges were especially difficult in rural areas.

Uneven Distribution and Application of Best Practices Information

Rural Summit participants expressed concern that the research evidence and its implications to juvenile justice were not clearly communicated to justice system stakeholders. This lack of knowledge was reportedly contributing to practices inconsistent with research-guided practice, such as court orders consisting of conditions that would not likely improve public safety. In fact, a number of stakeholders noted that plea agreements and court orders were “cookie cutter” and did not take into account criminogenic needs and responsivity factors, especially when these dispositions occur without the benefit of information provided by an actuarial assessment.

There are a number of reasons why new information that could assist local practitioners does not readily penetrate court practices. A lack of resources limits training opportunities. Even if training opportunities were provided, getting stakeholders together can be challenging. Some offices are staffed by only one or two individuals. Leaving the office unattended is not always possible. An urgent, unexpected request for the office’s attention (e.g., a crisis, grant request with short timelines, problems with a high profile case) can thwart well-intentioned efforts to attend a scheduled training session. Furthermore, large geographical distances can limit attendance, especially with inclement weather.

Unclear Benefit of EBP

A number of stakeholders indicated that some juvenile justice stakeholders appeared disinterested in EBP and did not feel compelled to get involved or examine practice in light of research findings. This could be due to a number of reasons, some of which were reported to be a lack of stakeholder interest in recidivism reduction outcomes, a belief that stakeholders already know the youth and their families and what needs to be done,

rejection of the research because of inconsistency with stakeholders' personal views, resistance to change in general, and/or a belief that the general public would not support the conclusions and implications of the research. Many justice system stakeholders are elected and must be especially attentive to locally held values. Parents, school officials, and other community members may have more pronounced informal relationships with court system personnel than their urban counterparts. They are more likely to see and interact with juvenile justice personnel in grocery stores, places of worship, or local service clubs and can have cordial, friendly relations with them. What happens in the courtroom is not isolated from the public's day-to-day interactions with justice system personnel, and expectations that the justice system will "fix" community problems may be more pronounced.

Justice system decisions and practices that are too far removed from local public attitudes and victims' wishes for specific court outcomes can create discontentment and frustration among the public. A disenfranchised public not only makes reelection more difficult for elected officials but it can create a chasm of distrust between the justice system, victims, and the people the justice system serves. It is not clear if the perception that EBP may be contrary to the public's expectations is reflective of inaccurate EBP messaging or interpretation bias. It can also be a matter of lack of courage, whereby elected officials are not willing to challenge local opinion and exercise leadership when local attitudes are not reflective of best practices. Regardless of the reason, the perception that EBP does not provide sufficient benefit to justice system stakeholders needs to be addressed.

Inability to Sustain Change

Rural communities do not have a deep pool of personnel to call upon when change is needed. Often, one or two people who feel the strongest about a particular issue are burdened with trying to make change happen. These individuals cannot necessarily count on recruiting a large group of others who feel similarly. The good news is that change can occur through the actions of a few. The bad news is that it can take only one or two people who resist the change to thwart the effort, when the effort would have been beneficial to the local community. In addition, momentum toward change can suddenly be brought to a standstill when one player in a key position leaves his/her position and the successor does not share similar views toward the change. It can take an extended effort to change institutional and traditional practice and only one shift in key personnel to reverse that change effort. One person can make a big difference, especially in a rural area, both in making changes and in thwarting change.

Collaboration Challenges

Rural communities tend to benefit from a number of strengths due both to necessity (one needs to rely on others for assistance) and familiarity (one is more likely to assist someone with whom one is familiar). As such, collaboration is often cited as one of a rural community's greatest strengths. Stakeholders can solicit advice, services, or other assistance from colleagues and service providers when needed. However, a number of rural-specific circumstances can challenge the ability to take advantage of this strength, thereby squandering a unique opportunity. These circumstances can include the following:

- As noted above, getting stakeholders to meet on a regular basis can be difficult given the small number of personnel in each office, geographic distances, etc.
- One key stakeholder who does not support a particular effort can impede the ability of others to move forward. If, for example, an elected or appointed official does not philosophically agree with the use of actuarial assessments in guiding prosecutorial, court, or probation decisions, this effort will be stymied.
- In some communities, specific stakeholders have traditionally not been as included in juvenile justice collaboration as others—in particular, police, victim services, and schools. While these stakeholders are critically important to the community's well-being, not every rural community has brought these stakeholders to the table for purposes of examining how their missions and resources could better lend themselves to juvenile justice outcomes, and vice versa.

Potential Solutions to Stakeholder Challenges

Examine the Change Agent Perspective. When one is passionate about promoting a desired change, it can be aggravating to see efforts thwarted when stakeholders do not share similar views. It is easy to become disheartened or even cynical. Change agents seeking to advance evidence-based practices are better served when they understand these stakeholder issues simply as challenges or temporary perspectives and not *fait accompli*. Strategic thinking on how to approach the situation is required. Some of these strategic approaches may work in some circumstances and at some points in time but not on other occasions. In the end, however, it is clear that the change agent will likely be unsuccessful if he/she fails to respect differences in opinion. Every point of view is reasoned from a particular person's perspective. To dismiss this

reasoning is to imply that one person is right and the other is wrong. This approach rarely produces positive, collaborative outcomes.

Ensure Core Concepts Are Understood Accurately. As individuals and as stakeholders, we tend to view concepts and information based on our own experiences and perspectives. It is easy to misinterpret information when the communicator is imprecise or is unable to convey the information in a way that the receiver can hear from his/her perspective. Misinterpretation can also occur when the receiver makes inaccurate assumptions based on previous experience or when his/her personal or professional concerns impede hearing the information as stated. It is therefore important for the messenger to convey a clear understanding of the EBP concepts from the various perspectives represented in the justice system. This will reduce the level of misunderstanding, fear, and resistance.

Listen Carefully for Stakeholder Needs. Every stakeholder has unique needs or goals, whether that is to satisfy a personal, professional mission; “make a difference”; obtain a higher, more responsible position; or perform professional duties with the least difficulty. Change agents must understand the stakeholders’ needs in order to ensure that the desired change he/she is seeking either advances those goals or, at the very least, does not impede them. Details are important. If, for example, a stakeholder is reluctant to embrace a new program out of concern that it would appear to be “soft on crime,” it would be in the best interest of that change agent to be sensitive to such matters as the name of the program or the use of behavioral change incentives. A program for teenage girls who have violent delinquent histories that is entitled Helping Unstable Girls (HUG) and that provides cash gifts for good behavior would not likely engender the support of elected officials who ran on a public safety platform, even if the program was effective at reducing future violence. Each stakeholder need can be viewed as a “hook,” a condition that would lead to increased interest, if addressed.

Be Strategic. Show Results. Some stakeholders are suspicious of research, its methodology, and its findings, as well as researchers’ motivation or understanding of juvenile justice. In some cases, stakeholders rely on intuition and their own personal experiences. In other cases, stakeholders are primarily interested in seeing results and are reluctant to change practice without proof that a shift in existing practice will work. An effective change agent will understand and strategically meet each stakeholder’s needs.

There are a number of options to help stakeholders who need to see data. On a national level, websites and studies abound. For example, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy has published numerous studies on what works in reducing crime and delinquency and what doesn’t. It specializes in cost–benefit analysis, giving the reader a cost–benefit ratio for each of the programs it examines. Other stakeholders will want to

see local data. This is a reasonable request, and the change agent should plan on objectively collecting data and communicating it in a clear and transparent manner so that stakeholders can decide whether and how to support the effort.

As noted, not everyone is interested in data and, in fact, may be suspicious of it. Some of these individuals are more interested in, and more influenced by, personal stories. To accommodate this group of individuals, the change agent might look for opportunities to provide personal testimonies. Examples include graduation ceremonies, especially when the participants have opportunities to share their experiences; newsletters with written testimonies; or personal interactions, such as court review hearings or, more informally, brief one-on-one exchanges between an individual on supervision and a stakeholder.

To aid in the effort of strategically meeting stakeholder needs, the change agent might consider completing a stakeholder analysis by following these steps:

- Brainstorm a list of all agencies, organizations, individuals, institutions, etc., that have a stake in EBP issues. This should include people who are or could be affected by the proposed change, who have influence or power over how and if the change will be successful, or who have an interest in the success (or failure) of the efforts. Ensure that appropriate training on EBP occurs—expose everyone to the concepts.
- Identify if those agencies, organizations, individuals, and institutions have high or low interest in EBP and high or low influence in the change that is being sought (i.e., develop a power/interest grid).
- For each entity with high interest and high power, list their perceived motivations and needs.
- Based on the above, identify a strategy for each.

For example, you may determine that the following information dissemination strategies might be useful for the stakeholder issues listed below. Other, non-dissemination strategies might also be employed.

Probation Issue. What is the benefit of assessment in light of the time required to conduct the assessment, especially when probation staff already know a lot about the youth?

Strategy: Demonstrate that assessment does, in fact, have value despite the relative familiarity of the youth and their families. Distribute studies that show that probation staff often miscalculate risk levels without assessment tools and that many issues are often not recognized (e.g., trauma or antisocial attitudes).

Commonwealth Attorney Issue. How can I support EBP when it contradicts what law enforcement, victims, and the public want?

Strategy: Use published surveys to demonstrate that victims and law enforcement are often most interested in justice solutions that prevent future crime. In addition, show published surveys demonstrating that justice system stakeholders tend to possess attitudes and views of punishment and accountability that are more severe than those of the public and that stakeholders misinterpret actual public attitudes.

Judges Issue. How can I give a youth a treatment disposition when the severity of the crime indicates that more accountability is warranted?

Strategy: Show research that demonstrates that attending behavioral health programs and supervision is perceived to be more onerous by the lawbreaker than placement in a correctional facility.

All Stakeholders Issue. Why should I adopt these changes when the risk of backlash is great if the youth fails, especially if the new offense is violent?

Strategy: Provide written articles such as “Twenty Evidence-Based Sentencing Practices to Reduce Recidivism,” by Roger Warren, or “Doing Evidence-Based Policy and Practices Ain’t for Sissies,” by Frank Domurad. These articles describe how applying research evidence to decision making improves outcomes and provides a rational response to possible criticism when the public second-guesses stakeholder decisions after experiencing a high-profile repeat offense.

Consider Work-Arounds. Sometimes, stakeholders will not support EBP no matter how hard change agents attempt to meet their needs. In such cases, it might be necessary to do “work-arounds.” Work-arounds are simply ways to retrofit a solution around a set of structural barriers, in the same way as one might reroute a pipeline around bedrock. If, for example, the defense counsel will not support the use of assessment information at the adjudication hearing, the probation department might use the assessment information to guide supervision practices and, if necessary, ask the court to modify the conditions on a case-by-case basis when the conditions do not match the assessment results. While this is not an efficient process, it may be necessary due to stakeholder concerns about the possible influence of the assessment on the hearing outcome. In some cases, the jurisdiction might be able to defer disposition hearings until a proper intake can be completed—one that includes the use of a validated risk/needs instrument to identify overall risk level and criminogenic needs that are appropriate for targeted interventions.

Often, EBP proponents who are frustrated by stakeholder disinterest or opposition to evidence-based changes to practice fall into the trap of “all or nothing” thinking. This thinking includes statements such as “We can’t do evidence-based practices here because our courts aren’t interested” or “Our probation department is led by an ‘old-school’ chief who won’t be retiring for a few years, so we will have to wait him out.” Evidence-based practices include a wide variety of potential applications across multiple disciplines that intersect juvenile justice. In fact, it is commonly reported that it takes about ten years to fully integrate EBP in a justice system, even when conditions are fertile for such changes. While full EBP implementation may not be possible for one reason or another, some progress can be made in some areas when the circumstances and timing are right. Even minor adjustments reflecting EBP concepts can have measureable, positive impacts. Change agents should look for arenas where efforts will be rewarded with positive outcomes in the shorter term and take a longer-term view of those areas where the timing may not currently be right.

Renovate and Clarify the Message. A common misstep of EBP proponents is unintentionally communicating that EBP is soft on crime and/or the antithesis of holding youth accountable. This can occur when sharing research literature that shows incarceration, supervision, and intermediate sanctions do not by themselves change behavior and can even slightly increase rearrest rates. Evidence-based practices do not advocate for or against sanctions. They are neutral on this point. EBP simply states that if all the justice system does is respond to noncompliant behavior, one cannot expect long-term, changed behavior. Unfortunately, either the one communicating the research findings or the one receiving the information often interprets EBP as indicating that the justice system should not hold the youth accountable or use sanctions.

In reality, EBP is consistent with balanced and restorative justice, which includes a focus on victim sensitivity and public safety, as well as on accountability. To clarify what EBP means, change agents are encouraged to consider the following action steps:

- Create an “elevator speech,” which is a short, 20-second summary of what EBP means for the local community. This elevator speech should crystalize EBP’s core message using terminology that most people will immediately understand.
- Define what “accountability” really means. Does accountability require sanctions? If so, what constitutes sanctions? Does accountability include the perception of the individual receiving the sanctions, the perceptions of others, or both?
- Create, for all stakeholders, a PowerPoint presentation or brochure on the key EBP messages in order to increase consistency in language and concepts. (See the JJSES Implementation Manual for resources to assist with this process.)

- Create stakeholder-specific documents that communicate EBP (i.e., documents that explore EBP from the perspective of each stakeholder).²
- Provide concrete examples of how stakeholders in other jurisdictions are applying EBP to their work. For example, probation staff in Travis County, Texas, are using color in their pre-dispositional reports to better illustrate risk levels (red for high risk, gold for medium risk, and blue for low risk). Defense counsel in Mesa County, Colorado, helped organize an effort to ensure that strength-based language was included in probation court reports in order to provide a more balanced and evidence-based approach to an offender’s assets and liabilities. Law enforcement officers in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, are using a brief, three-question assessment to help them determine whether to cite or arrest individuals upon detection of illegal behavior.

Communicate Relentlessly. Focus on What’s Important. The physics axiom “A body in motion tends to stay in motion” also applies to organizational and system momentum. Trainings and events cannot be “one and done.” Routine practices tend to be perpetuated because they are familiar, require less effort, and are comfortable. New information—even information that can improve results—can be dismissed or set aside when it challenges the status quo. New concepts may need to be repeated in different ways and in varied avenues before it can no longer be ignored. What is made repeatedly visible and apparent is more likely to get attention.

The question, then, becomes how does a change agent get stakeholders’ attention in a world and field that is bombarded with messages, to-do lists, “shoulds,” and urgent day-to-day matters? How does one communicate in “sound bites” in order to respect time constraints and needs that overwhelm stakeholder attention spans? Change agents are encouraged to find short, concise means of letting others know how science is helping shape juvenile justice, such as the following:

- Write short newsletters that describe how local EBP efforts are impacting outcomes. (Go to <http://nicic.gov> and click on "Subscribe to Newsletters & Alerts" for examples.)
- Develop research briefs such as those developed by the Colorado Division of Probation Services (see http://www.courts.state.co.us/Administration/Custom.cfm?Unit=eval&Page_ID=180).

² Examples of stakeholder communication on implementing EBP throughout the criminal justice system have or are being developed. See the National Institute of Corrections’ Evidence-Based Decision Making initiative at <http://nicic.gov/EBDM> and the Crime and Justice Institute and National Institute of Corrections’ EBP Box Set papers at http://www.crj.org/cji/entry/publication_boxset.

- Disseminate the free publication *Criminological Highlights* which can be found at http://www.criminology.utoronto.ca/lib/criminological_highlights.html.
- Encourage stakeholders to sign up for the JCJC Newsletter, at www.jcjc.state.pa.us, for continually updated information regarding JJSES/EBP.

Customize Training and Meeting Opportunities. Getting stakeholders to attend unique events such as EBP trainings or routine events such as ongoing planning sessions can be challenging for the reasons noted above. Participation will often be contingent on finding innovative ways to overcome financial and logistical barriers. The following are a few ways that rural communities can increase attendance:

- Provide the legal community with trainings that offer CLE credits.
- Plan events for non-working hours such as early morning, lunch, or evening.
- Provide a meal as part of the event.
- Create regional opportunities, where costs are shared among different jurisdictions.
- Create web-based opportunities.
- Organize conference calls.
- Include messages in existing formats or protocols, such as local Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) meetings or other similar activities.

Start an Inter-agency Collaborative Justice Council. One of the ways to guard against abrupt and sudden shifts in priorities away from EBP is to establish an inter-agency collaborative team that meets on a regular basis to examine the degree to which policies and practices align with research findings. Many Pennsylvania counties already have CJABs. These collaborative bodies provide a potentially efficient means to address EBP policy implications without having to form another board.

Research evidence supports the role of collaboration in positively contributing to effective justice system outcomes (see, for example, Adler, Kwon, & Heckscher, 2008; Collins & Porras, 1997; Heckscher & Adler, 2006; Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland, & Cunningham, 1998; Larson & LaFasto, 1989). Individuals who represent different interests and organizations in the juvenile justice system can agree on the common goal of decreasing offenses and harm. The more an entire justice system works toward agreed-upon goals and establishes a culture of collaboration by using evidence-based practices, the less likely one stakeholder will discount the concerted effort of his/her colleagues, especially in a more informal rural setting, where relationships are especially valued as a means of getting things done.

CHALLENGE TWO: PROBATION STAFF CHALLENGES

Every entity in the juvenile justice system and all its partners have a responsibility to stay current on research and best practices. Innovation and learning is a constant reality, especially in this dynamic information age. Despite this shared responsibility, probation is often the most impacted by research implications. While there is research on evidence-based practices that relate to all aspects of working with justice-involved youth, there is more research on probation-related practices, such as conducting assessments, utilizing Motivational Interviewing, engaging in skill practice, making program referrals, using rewards and incentives, and addressing violations. Probation services remain at the intersecting point of many stakeholder activities, such as adjudication hearings, violations, assessments, and placements. As such, it is critical that probation staff be familiar with research, apply it with fidelity, be given the time and tools to perform their behavioral change role, and gain some comfort with practices that are expected to decrease recidivism rates. The field of probation, however, has a number of challenges. Some of those challenges are exacerbated in rural areas, making research-guided practices, such as supervision specialization, separating youth by risk level, gaining access to the right services given the limited pool of options, etc., more difficult. For these and other reasons, it is important to understand these challenges and employ possible solutions.

Lack of Time

Implementing EBP has implications on how staff resources are used. For instance, it takes time to complete the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) assessment thoroughly and accurately, especially in light of the need to collect and consider supporting documents and to prepare a report upon completion of the assessment. This is not an activity one would want to rush. Reassessment should be conducted periodically, and inter-rater reliability processes should be put in place. Staff need to be trained on Motivational Interviewing, effective one-on-one interactions, and cognitive behavioral tools. Management needs to work closely with service providers and court personnel to ensure that the programs utilized are appropriate for the referrals. These and related concerns about having time to put in place evidence-based practices are not unique to rural areas. However, rural areas have fewer resources to redeploy in new ways. Offices are often served by one or two people and these individuals must perform a myriad of duties. Shifting workload is often not an option. In addition, stakeholders rely on staff for all kinds of purposes, so much so that they are often referred to as a “Jack (or Jill) of all trades” and “the only game in town.” Even well-intentioned staff who are

trying to utilize research-based approaches may find themselves abruptly redirected due to a pressing need that only they can handle. Attending training means leaving the office empty, as well as not being accessible to other stakeholders to handle urgent matters. And, geographical distances means that a home or school visit can consume a half day or longer. Just keeping up with the BARJ principles of community protection, accountability, and competency development takes up a staff member's attention and time. Adding evidence-based practices training and processes can quickly become overwhelming in such circumstances.

Implications of Role Shift

The use of EBP for purposes of risk reduction provides probation staff with a fairly clear set of behavioral expectations. While some staff have indicated that EBP is consistent with what they have understood as their department's mission, others have indicated that it represents a significant shift. This shift is reportedly away from community protection and accountability and toward engaging in activities that promote long term behavioral change, with probation officers serving as behavioral change agents. Some view the shift toward the role of behavioral change agent as conflicting with what they previously perceived their role to be. Yet others have expressed further confusion over whether the State has vacated or diminished its long-held BARJ mission. For some staff, this perceived shift is an unpleasant one—one that moves further away from their personal value system, a system that they feel BARJ upholds.

In the midst of these change messages, staff have expressed anxiety and a fear of failure with respect to this perceived “new” role, wondering if they have the skills to perform this role and what will happen if they cannot successfully navigate this shift. What will become of their professional future? Some feel that EBP is for “providers” and “places where we refer kids,” yet a huge proportion of kids in our system are engaged solely with probation officers, not “providers.” This is particularly true in rural counties, where other resources are scarce.

Perceived Negative Personal Impact

The above-mentioned role shift creates a set of perceived, potential negative impacts, including the following:

- Lack of power or control: the feeling that JJSES was thrust upon staff with little forewarning or input.
- A sense of being overwhelmed. The number of processes to master and the effort required to become proficient in them feels overwhelming to many staff, especially in light of the challenges of working in rural communities without an abundance of resources.

- Loss of personal job satisfaction. Some staff reportedly feel confident in their existing role and believe that they are adding value. On the other hand, EBP appears to be “touchy feely,” and what is being required of staff seems to be inconsistent with their perceived strengths and personal beliefs about what the department should be doing. In a nutshell, they are ambivalent about the direction JJSES is taking the field in general and themselves in particular.
- Concern about future job security if EBP is successful at reducing recidivism. While staff support the desired goal of improving public safety through risk reduction, the implications are personal: the need for their jobs may be diminished.

In addition to these potential impacts, some staff express concern over fairness—that is, they perceive that their jobs will be more difficult and that their responsibilities will increase as they become service providers and yet they will not be compensated for this increased set of expectations.

Implementation Concerns

It is not uncommon for implementation processes and outcomes to fall short of their potential, whether in public or private sectors. Successful implementation requires coordinated leadership, collaboration, strategic planning, and effective communication. Often, staff remember the failure of past change efforts and are suspicious of new ones, especially in light of longstanding barriers that have thwarted other change efforts. The following are some examples of barriers that could resurface as EBP is rolled out:

- Personnel issues, such as a limited pool of qualified candidates and high turnover rates;
- Insufficient guidance, support, or practical demonstration of how to implement the new work expectations;
- Difficulty in specializing probation caseloads by risk and in modifying contact standards in order to accommodate staff resources needed to implement evidence-based practices such as facilitating cognitive behavioral groups; and
- Inability or unwillingness to coordinate training and policy/practice changes between adult and juvenile probation.

Potential Solutions to Probation Staff Challenges

Listen to and Engage Staff. A common mistake made by decision makers is that of misinterpreting staff concerns as signs of overt resistance instead of as natural concerns regarding the process of change. That is, before staff are able to embrace a change effort, they need to grieve over what they may lose (e.g., comfort, predictability, confidence), have opportunities to express their concerns openly, get answers to their questions about implementation, and understand what benefits or disadvantages they may experience, among others. Staff express these concerns differently, have varying tolerance levels toward change—any change, accept change at different paces, and need different things in order to accept change. Management would benefit from understanding the science of implementation and adopting certain processes to usher and guide the change process.³

One of the most important ways to help staff in the change process is to give them a way to help shape the change. There are many ways to give staff a role, such as establishing an EBP Implementation Committee or giving individual staff meaningful assignments (such as conducting literature searches, interviewing colleagues in neighboring jurisdictions who have implemented EBP, attending a statewide conference, or conducting a field trip to an area that has made significant progress in EBP).

Go Slow to Go Fast. Probation departments have provided high quality services prior to and during the last two decades of EBP knowledge dissemination. It is not as if probation is in a critically desperate situation. There is no emergency. However, EBP provides probation with the opportunity to make incremental improvements by using research to examine and modify existing practices. Going slow and implementing EBP in small steps allows staff to understand, practice, and observe changes and their implications. This pace of change is less threatening than a sudden and abrupt switch in practice. This is not to say that management should be complacent with the status quo. It is incumbent on leadership to act upon new information that will likely lead to improved outcomes. However, barring an emergency, the action does not need to be swift. Movement toward EBP is best received and implemented when it is done incrementally, with the full participation of those affected. Relentless attention to the fidelity of implemented evidence-based practices is needed, but this attention should be balanced with what is practical and doable by those being asked to change.

Implementation science research has repeatedly pointed out the importance of planning to successful implementation. Many change efforts move ahead without taking the upfront time to determine goals, develop logic models, assess potential strengths and barriers,

³ For more information, see the Network of Implementation Research Network at www.nirn.com.

assess and engage stakeholders, etc. Putting this planning time up front may slow the initial progress of the change effort but it will yield better results and can even increase the speed of change over the longer term.

Provide Meaningful On-the-Job Feedback. The vast majority of staff in any business want to do a good job. In fact, most staff enjoy a sense of pride when they perform well, experience personal benefit in their work, and are motivated by helping others. When employees are given job satisfaction surveys, one of the most common reasons they give for staying in a particular job or career is that they experience personal growth opportunities. An EBP probation department should capitalize on this natural drive to learn and grow by giving staff on-the-job coaching and feedback designed to help them become more effective in their work and improve results. Staff in departments that have implemented EBP have often reported that they began to embrace EBP when they personally experienced positive change in the individuals with whom they worked. Most often, these are the same departments that provide staff with meaningful feedback that helps them increase their effectiveness. This feedback usually requires quality assurance mechanisms such as direct or indirect observation and case file reviews.

Diversify the Messenger. It is human nature to view new information skeptically, especially when one has performed a job a particular way for years and someone suggests that it be done differently. One may discount such a message the first time one hears it. As the message is repeated—especially by others, such as a colleague in another county, a stakeholder in another department, or an entity outside the field (e.g., the media or a local university)—the individual may pay closer attention. Management should find ways to diversify both who delivers the message and how that message is delivered.

Who. Diversifying the “who” might include inviting a speaker from out of the area, showing a video clip from an expert practitioner or researcher, or inviting a judge or prosecutor to speak on the topic. The Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, stage leaders for the JJSES effort, and regional planning committee chairs are potential resources for local jurisdictions seeking to diversify the messenger.

How. Diversifying the “how” includes disseminating information in writing, verbally, by video, and experientially (such as hearing a testimony).

Measure and Modify. Some individuals are not persuaded by testimonies or stories. They need data. Indeed, research-based evidence implies that quantitative data provides stronger empirical support that something works than anecdotal information. Some staff and stakeholders will need to see the actual data before they will lend their full support to EBP. Local data that is objectively collected and reported tends to be received better than data from other jurisdictions. And, transparency improves the acceptance of data.

Sometimes, data yields negative results. Data that shows that something did not work is as valuable as data that shows that something is working.

Data provides the justice system with feedback that can be used to modify and improve the process or intervention. In addition, it provides management an opportunity to point out the benefits of the process or intervention to staff. For example, there is a fair amount of research that points out that the implementation of EBP has not only improved recidivism results but has led to fewer in-custody disciplines, decreased community supervision violations, and increased staff job satisfaction. This kind of data would be useful for staff who want or need to know “What is in it for me?”

Empower Your Champion(s). Probation directors often conduct an informal environmental scan to identify barriers or threats to effective EBP implementation in order to determine where to focus attention. This is not a bad strategy. However, every justice system has one or more strong advocates of change whose values, skills, and attitudes align with EBP. These individuals could be effective message carriers if they have the respect, interpersonal skills, and willingness to serve as “EBP champions.” Champions typically understand the desired change, possess the ability to influence others, and are in a position to be engaged formally or informally in that capacity. They can hold a position of authority or just be people of influence. Sometimes, these individuals possess some of the above characteristics but not all of them. Management will want to empower their champions of EBP while managing these leaders’ potential shortcomings.

Link Rewards with Desired Change. Management will want to examine the rewards and incentives provided to staff. If rewards are given for work that does not align with EBP, staff may be confused by the inconsistent messaging. It should not be surprising when staff gravitate to those activities that the department is rewarding, whether formally (e.g., pay raises, promotions, coveted job duties) or informally (e.g., affirmations, conference attendance).

Link the Desired Change to Existing Experiences. Anxiety about EBP is often related to fear of the unknown. EBP can sound foreign and intimidating, as if it is significantly dissimilar to that which is currently practiced. The reality is that it is not unfamiliar nor is it necessarily a significant departure from what is already in place.

Change is less threatening when it appears to require a small leap from current practice. For example, asking staff to conduct skill practice sessions with youth can sound like therapy or counseling, a concept that is different from probation officers’ training. However, when one examines what it means to teach a skill, it is actually much more like parenting or coaching of youth. Everyone is familiar with parenting and coaching.

Teaching a youngster how to apologize, problem solve, or ask for help are basic skills we learned through our parents and coaches. All probation officers had parents or are parents, or both, and can relate to the concept of teaching or being taught a skill, thereby decreasing anxiety.

As another example, many counties have specialty courts such as a mental health or drug court. Staff are therefore familiar with the use of affirmations and immediate consequences, wraparound services, individual accountability, and effective treatment strategies. These are evidence-based practices that need to also be applied to case management and other functions within probation, if they don't already exist. Change is far less threatening when linked to our existing experiences.

Build the Feeder Pool. Most probation chiefs point out that it is easier to train, coach, and guide a new employee in EBP than a staff member who has years of experience performing case management another way. As new positions open up, the probation department would benefit greatly from recruiting individuals who have been exposed to, understand, and embrace the evidence-based practices expected of them. Increasingly, universities and colleges are integrating the principles of risk, need, and responsivity in their curricula; therefore, new recruits are more readily prepared to accept and apply EBP. Probation departments are urged to examine the employee feeder source to determine if the pool of candidates is EBP prepared.

Give Useful Tools to Staff. As noted above, it is not enough to send probation staff to trainings and expect them to implement EBP. Many of the interventions require structure, aids, and tools. Expecting staff to “do EBP” without access to these tools makes about as much sense as asking someone to build a house without a saw or hammer. A number of highly refined tools are now available for probation staff such as journals (developed by the Change Companies), BITs and Carey Guides worksheets (developed by Carey Group Publishing), and exercises from existing cognitive behavioral interventions (e.g., Aggression Replacement Training and Thinking for a Change). Reports by users of many of these tools indicate that they do not increase the length of one-on-one appointments by more than two minutes, that they provide a means for probation officers to focus on criminogenic needs, and that they help reduce recidivism. For these and other reasons, probation officers require criminogenic-specific tools to help them achieve risk reduction.

Explicitly Clarify Expectations Under EBP. Most probation officers will perform the duties expected of them even if they do not agree with the department's mission and processes. They understand that they are hired to do a job and that management defines the job duties. However, it is not uncommon for departments to be unclear as to what is expected. Staff attend EBP trainings but little is communicated after

the trainings regarding expectations. Management sometimes assumes that staff will just “get it” after the training and be able to determine how to perform their job better or differently due to the training. Instead, departments are encouraged to be highly explicit as to what staff are supposed to do, when those expectations begin, and how staff will be assisted as the change unfolds. Some examples of how to clarify staff expectations include the following:

- Revise job descriptions.
- Revise department policies.
- Provide video clips of how to hold one-on-one appointments aimed at risk reduction.
- Provide checklists for staff to post at their desks.
- Develop “cheat sheets,” such as ones that describe which interventions to use for each of the criminogenic needs.
- Hold regular case staffings where EBP-specific questions are posed.
- Consider formalizing and certifying staff positions and compensation, similar to the way the state of Utah certified PO positions based on mastery of EBP requirements.

Build EBP Coalitions. Probation does not operate in a vacuum; it works with a number of service providers and justice system partners to meet its mission. Outcomes are more likely achieved when most or all of these entities use similar language, concepts, and evidence-based principles. Coalitions can help galvanize disjointed efforts toward a risk reduction orientation. Examples include conducting regional trainings where diverse partners can attend, conducting multi-discipline staffings, holding cross-discipline planning meetings, and writing joint grant applications.

CHALLENGE THREE: LOCAL RESOURCES AND SERVICES CHALLENGES

The juvenile justice system is reliant on its service partners to achieve risk reduction objectives. Mental health, substance abuse, behavioral health, family counseling, education and employment, and other services are critically important components of a system that seeks to aid youth and families in achieving self-sufficiency and healthy lifestyles. It is important to have a wide assortment of programs and to customize the approach in order to respond to each youth's unique needs and improve the likelihood of success. Programs need to be developed in accordance with research evidence and delivered with fidelity to the proven model. In rural communities, this can be especially challenging due to limited scale and resources.

Lack of Service Availability and Diversity

One of the most commonly expressed frustrations among rural communities is the difficulty in building a continuum of needed services. Ideally, a community would have access to a number of programs that could be adapted to a youth's specific needs and responsivity factors, such as educational level, culture, motivation, risk to reoffend, gender, developmental age, mental health, and so forth. Obviously, this is extremely challenging in a rural area. Resources are more limited. There are not enough referrals for a service provider to financially sustain unique programs or even to operate a group intervention. This is especially true when the referral population pool is small, such as with sex offenders. There is often only "one game in town," which may or may not have the kind of specialty required to positively impact a youth's behavior. In addition, some programs only take referrals funded by medical assistance, which further limits services available to the justice system.

There are challenges for service providers, too. They often find themselves struggling to confine a program to its core mission when needing to increase the referral base in order to economically deliver services. In addition, justice system professionals sometimes apply persuasion or even pressure to take a referral outside of the service provider's model or expertise because other options are not available. The view is that "something is better than nothing."

One of the components of an effective juvenile justice program is that it targets a specific risk level of offender (low, medium, or high) and specific criminogenic needs (e.g., antisocial cognition, coping skills, family, peers, etc.). Programs that are "eclectic" and handle multiple criminogenic needs tend to have less impact on recidivism reduction than those that deliver a skill-based curriculum focused on a single need. In rural areas,

however, service providers feel compelled to meet all potential referral needs and sometimes do not hone their programs in a specific, structured manner.

Service Provider Engagement in EBP

Many service providers struggle to keep up with the research literature either because of inadequate funding to attend trainings or the inability to find time to review and modify programming. In some cases, juvenile justice officials express frustration over the perceived lack of service providers' willingness to modify their programs when faced with evidence indicating that a change is warranted. Clearly, doing "business as usual" is less stressful on staff and resources but, unless the service is delivering a fully implemented evidence-based program, it is also less effective.

Despite funding restrictions, geographical distance, and workload, juvenile justice professionals occasionally are able to attend conferences and trainings that encourage an examination of practices, challenge existing practices, and offer solutions that might improve outcomes. Service providers reportedly have less opportunity for EBP trainings, assessments, and other ways to reflect on service delivery due to the aforementioned resource constraints.

Lack of Evaluation of Service Provider Outcomes

Research on effective programs is encouraging. Programs that are developed in accordance with research-guided principles can reduce recidivism by 30% or more and return a financial benefit of at least four dollars for every dollar invested (Aos et al., 2011).⁴ Some "homegrown" programs yield even greater results than those that have been evaluated sufficiently to be considered "evidence-based." However, not all programs are developed according to research-based principles, delivered with fidelity even if developed according to these principles, and/or objectively evaluated for outcomes. Spending limited resources on program assessments and evaluations of services is often viewed as a luxury and unfeasible. However, the failure to assess or evaluate programs increases the likelihood that they are not achieving the desired results and will not be modified or improved based on those results.

⁴ This is a conservative cost-benefit return according to research conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Potential Solutions to Local Resources and Services Challenges

Formalize an EBP Partnership with the Service Provider Community.

Rural communities often are characterized by exceptional collaboration, exhibited through informal relationships and networks. This strength can also be a weakness. Collaborative practices can continue without clear understandings of roles, boundaries, and agreements. They can be routinized by history and longstanding tradition. Notwithstanding the need to provide a fair, competitive bidding for services, a partnership between the justice system and service providers can be enhanced via direct and ongoing conversation about what is or is not expected. A formal contractual arrangement with a calendared review (e.g., annually) is more likely to be examined and discussed for additional opportunities and planning purposes. It might include agreements such as the following:

- Service providers will be invited to EBP-oriented training events.
- Efforts will be made to create more web-based trainings that involve more service providers.
- Contracts with service providers will include specific performance measures related to EBP (such as tracking by risk level of referrals, type of criminogenic needs addressed, dosage, etc.).
- Service providers will conduct an evaluation of their services through an independent evaluator every three years.
- The juvenile justice system and service providers will review the changing service needs of the juvenile justice system and modify services, if necessary.
- Service providers will provide logic models demonstrating program theory, inputs, intermediate measures, and outcomes.

Implement the CPC or SPEP Process. Assessment processes have been developed that provide guidance for county personnel and service providers on how to evaluate whether service components match research-guided practice. Programs that use these processes tend to achieve significantly better outcomes over time than those that don't. The Correctional Program Checklist (CPC) is an example of a program assessment that has successfully helped justice systems and service providers improve services.⁵ Under JJSES, a Pennsylvania-specific assessment service has been adopted: the Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP). The juvenile justice system and its

⁵ For more information on the CPC, go to the Utah Criminal Justice Center, University of Utah, website: http://ucjc.csw.utah.edu/?page_id=48.

service providers are urged to implement SPEP to aid in the assessment and improvement of services.

Dedicate and Redirect Funding (if Necessary). A concern expressed by rural communities is the lack of funding to pay for existing services or expansion. While it has not necessarily been other jurisdictions' experience that implementing EBP requires a lot of additional resources, it has meant that existing funding needs to be better targeted and some funding needs to be redirected. State grant-in-aid programs are increasingly targeting evidence-based programs such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Aggression Replacement Training (ART), and family-based decision making. Some rural communities have created regional applications and tapped into non-customary funding streams. The type and nature of these funding streams are beyond the scope of this report. However, it should be stressed that local rural communities will need to be strategic about how to dedicate existing or new funding.

One way to consider how to be strategic with respect to service funding is to conduct a gap analysis. This analysis compares the number of each criminogenic need exhibited by youth who enter the juvenile justice system, as determined through the YLS/CMI assessment, with the number of programming slots available in the community. The gap analysis may indicate that there are more slots than needed in some areas, such as substance abuse or education, and fewer slots than needed in other areas, such as antisocial cognition, coping skills, and peers. Existing community-based services can be realigned in light of this information through a partnership with the referral sources and service providers.

Develop a Plan Regarding Use of Services. Efforts such as the implementation of formal partnership agreements, application of SPEP among primary service providers, and conduct of a gap analysis will provide planners with information that can lead to the development of an action plan. This action plan can include a number of useful steps consistent with evidence-based practices such as the following:

- Realigning existing service provider programming (as noted above);
- Developing a service matrix that lists which interventions best meet the criminogenic and responsivity needs being addressed by the referral source;
- Delivering some cognitive behavioral programming within the juvenile probation department (facilitated by probation officers);
- Administering cognitive worksheets for appointments between probation and a youth; and

- Devising mechanisms for probation staff to reinforce what the youth is learning in local programming.⁶

⁶ An example of this is the National Institute of Corrections' *Thinking for a Change Skill Reinforcement Manual* for case workers who attend Thinking for a Change programming. Another example is the National Curriculum and Training Institute's *Cog Talk*, for those who attend the Crossroads program.

Conclusion

Implementing evidence-based practices can be highly challenging work, especially when seeking to involve, engage, and collaborate with all or most justice system stakeholders and local community service providers. This is true of any local justice community. It can be even more challenging in rural areas, where resources are often inadequate to meet the needs, access to local services is more limited, geographical distances are greater, data systems are more rudimentary, and reliance on one or two people in pivotal positions is more pronounced, just to name a few challenges.

The good news is that some rural communities have overcome these challenges with innovation, persistence, and collaboration. Indeed, a number of model evidence-based rural justice systems have emerged and provide insight and optimism to those seeking to replicate these experiences. This white paper provides a review of rural challenges for departments and systems attempting to implement practices and policies that are informed by research. Readers are urged to take advantage of the recommendations and the resources listed in the appendices to help them in their journey toward evidence-based decision making.

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Additional Resources

The following websites and readings are recommended for practitioners. They include commonly cited studies that inform evidence-based practices aimed at reducing recidivism. All resources have been reviewed. The list, however, is not all-encompassing; these suggestions are merely a starting point for acquiring basic information on juvenile and criminal justice research.

Websites

- Advancing Competency Development: A Resource Guide for Pennsylvania
<http://www.ncjj.org/Publication/Advancing-Competency-Development-A-Resource-Guide-for-Pennsylvania.aspx>
Lists programs to assist juvenile courts, probation departments, and service providers identify research-based curricula that can be implemented to provide skill-training services to court-involved youth.
- The Campbell Collaboration
<http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/>
Studies the effects of interventions in social, behavioral, and educational arenas.
- Carey Group Publishing
<http://www.careygroupublishing.com/>
Contains information on products that can be used with youth to reduce recidivism.
- Center for Criminal Justice Research, University of Cincinnati
<http://www.uc.edu/ccjr/reports.html>
Provides research studies on evidence-based practices.
- Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, George Mason University
<http://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/>
Contains a summary of law enforcement research and the relative strength of the research.
- Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado Boulder
<http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/>
Conducts studies, provides information, and offers technical assistance regarding violence prevention.

- The Corrections Institute, University of Cincinnati
<http://www.uc.edu/corrections.html>
Assists agencies seeking to change offender behavior.
- Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice, University of Maryland
<http://www.ccjs.umd.edu/landing/Research>
Provides research and publications on crime and juvenile justice.
- The EPISCenter
<http://episcenter.psu.edu>
Contains information on the dissemination, quality implementation, sustainability, and impact assessment of proven prevention and intervention programs, as well as original translational research, to advance the science and practice of evidence-based prevention.
- Institute of Behavioral Research, Texas Christian University
<http://www.ibr.tcu.edu/>
Studies addiction treatment in community and correctional settings.
- Juvenile Court Judges' Commission
www.jcj.state.pa.us/
Contains information on the Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy, including the JJSES Monograph.
- National Center for Juvenile Justice
www.ncjj.org
Contains information and publications on juvenile justice research.
- National Criminal Justice Reference Service
<http://ncjrs.gov/>
Contains a wide variety of studies and papers related to criminal justice.
- National Curriculum & Training Institute
http://www.ncti.org/criminal_justice/
Contains information on products that can be used with youth to reduce recidivism.
- National Youth Screening & Assessment Project (NYSAP)
<http://www.nysap.us>
Provides research and technical assistance in selecting assessments for youth involved in juvenile justice.

- NREPP: SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices
<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewAll.aspx>
Includes a list of justice-related programs and their related research studies.
- Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency
www.pccd.state.pa.us
Contains information about juvenile probation service grants, the Juvenile Justice Enhancement Strategy, and related technical assistance.
- Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers
www.pachiefprobationofficers.org
Contains information about the Juvenile Justice Enhancement Strategy and related technical assistance.
- Washington State Institute for Public Policy
<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/>
Conducts evaluations of evidence-based offender treatment interventions in Washington State.

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