Capitalizing on Collaboration in Arizona: Working Together to Advance the Use of Evidence-Based Officer Skills at All Levels of Community Corrections

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IF THE FIELD of community corrections increasingly knows "what works," why does our profession, as a whole, continue to struggle with "making it work"?

Consider this observation by Morris Thigpen: "From years of working with jurisdictions across the country, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has concluded that collaboration and rational planning are the keys to creating an effective criminal justice system" (McGarry & Ney, 2006, p. ix). Or consider *Collaboration: A Training Curriculum to Enhance the Effectiveness of Criminal Justice Teams* (Carter, Bumby, Gavin, Stroker, & Woodward, 2005). The authors point out that the term "collaboration" has become a "buzz word" that can be misunderstood and offer the following description of collaboration:

> It is the effort to improve the capacity of others that makes collaboration a unique enterprise. Collaboratives are different from cooperatives and coalitions because they involve more formal and sustained commitment, and rely on the conviction that, while retaining their uniqueness and autonomy, organizations that share and pursue common goals can accomplish much more together than they can alone. (Carter et al., 2005, p. 5)

Regarding the possible benefits collaboration can yield, Carter explains:

> Collaboration changes the way we work and requires a profound shift in our conception of how change is created. Collaboration shifts organizational focus from competing to consensus building; from working alone to including others; from thinking about activities to thinking about results and strategies; and from focusing on short-term accomplishments to demanding long-term results. (Carter et al., 2005, p. 5)

Amid 20 factors cited as important dimensions of successful collaboration reported by Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey (2001), the authors believe that five of the factors are key to the project we describe in this article. First, there is a history of collaboration between the stakeholders. Second, informal relationships and communication links already exist. Third, participants see the collaboration project as beneficial to each of their jurisdictions. Fourth, there are concrete, attainable goals and objectives. Finally, there is a shared vision regarding the problem to be solved and the solution to be used.

In line with the "rational planning" noted by Thigpen, Nutt (2002) studied how decisions are made, what works, what doesn't, and why. His work spanned more than 20 years and involved closely examining over 400 decisions made by managers in private, public, and nonprofit organizations across the United

States, Canada, and Europe. Essentially, he is describing a "rational planning" process. His key finding is startling: "…decisions fail half of the time. Vast sums are spent without realizing any benefits for the organization" (Nutt, 2002, p. ix).

Among the most critical methods Nutt identified for achieving successful change was a process based on logical and ethical rationality that examines and clearly identifies the intended direction (or need) of an agency or community. Further, a collaborative problem-solving process is then used to develop and implement a responsive plan. He found that there were three general categories of what he termed "blunders" that lead to failure: "…rushing to judgment, misusing resources, and applying failure prone tactics" (Nutt, 2002, p. x). Ironically, he points out that: "…decision making practices with a good track record are commonly known, but uncommonly practiced. Nearly everyone knows that participation prompts acceptance, but participation is rarely used" (Nutt, 2002, p. 4).

From our prospective, the guidance from Nutt noted above regarding collaboration and rational planning is foundational to succeeding at making "what works" a reality for our agencies and our profession. In this article, we hope to offer an example of what it might look like if the community corrections agencies in a state began to join together to implement

evidence-based officer skill-training curricula following a process based on the principles discussed above regarding collaboration and rational planning. We have begun by sharing resources, strategy, and implementation processes, all with the shared vision of reducing recidivism. In this instance, we are building on a strong history of effective collaboration, strong communication ties, and an agreement to use the same curriculum (how to solve the problem of recidivism).

The Training Curriculum Used for This Project

The current project used the EPICS-II curriculum (Lowenkamp, Lowenkamp, & Robinson, 2010). The EPICS-II curriculum is similar to other supervision-based training curricula currently in use in correctional settings. Models like Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) (Bonta, Bourgon, Rugge, Scott, Yessine, Gutierrez, & Li, 2010), STARR (Lowenkamp, Robinson, VanBenschoten, & Alexander, 2009), Proactive Community Supervision (PCS) (Taxman, Yancey, & Bilanin, 2006), and Working with Involuntary Clients (Trotter, 1999) all use similar skill sets and most target offenders' cognitions. Many of these models have been evaluated to determine their impacts on offender outcomes, with favorable results (see Bonta et al., 2010; Robinson, Lowenkamp, Holsinger, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Oleson, 2012; Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Alexander, 2012; Trotter, 1996; and Taxman, Yancey, & Bilanin, 2006).

A Foundation of Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration in Arizona

In 2008 and 2009, under the leadership of the United States Attorney's Office (USAO), a coalition of more than 60 stakeholders representing law enforcement, the courts, corrections, public defenders, probation, housing providers, substance abuse and health care providers, educators, nonprofits, the faith-based community, and other concerned citizens began meeting to discuss how "to promote the successful reintegration of men and women leaving the correctional system in order to reduce crime and recidivism, and increase public safety" (USAO AZ, 2010, p. 3). The significance of this collaboration was discussed in the August 2011 publication by the Department of Justice: "Reentry Toolkit for United States Attorneys' Offices" (p. 16). Speaking specifically about the sustained and

significant nature of the collaborative work in Arizona, the report noted:

> The USAO's reentry initiative represents a unique and extraordinary statewide collaboration of all the key reentry stakeholders in Arizona. Through the leadership and convening power of the USAO, this initiative has produced a comprehensive series of reentry recommendations as well as an ongoing structure that globally addresses all aspects of reentry in Arizona. (DOJ, August 2011)

We mention this information to illustrate the tradition of collaboration that served as the context for the project discussed in this article. The following governmental organizations all played key roles in the leadership of the USAO reentry initiative: AOC Adult Services Division, the Maricopa County Adult Probation Office, Maricopa County Manager's Office, Yavapai County Adult Probation Office, Arizona Department of Corrections (ADOC), the Phoenix Police Department, and the United States Probation Office. While the current project focus has narrowed and these agencies' roles have changed, all the agencies noted above that deliver community corrections services in Arizona are involved in this project.

Evidence-Based Practices in the County Community Corrections System in Arizona

In 2002, the county Chief Adult Probation Officers, in collaboration with the Adult Probation Services Division of the Administrative Office of the State Supreme Court (AOC), made a significant decision to adopt the use of the Offender Screening Tool (OST) as the standardized assessment tool for all 15 adult probation departments in the State of Arizona. This decision was the starting point for the use of Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) in Adult Probation across the entire state and was fully implemented by 2003. During the next several years, changes in the Arizona Codes of Judicial Administration and local department policies as well as mandatory training paved the way for all 15 adult probation departments to become certified and approved as Evidence-Based Practice counties by the Arizona Supreme Court.[1]

This and other EBP-based systemic reforms have begun to positively impact outcomes in the county adult probation system. Revocations to the ADOC have been reduced

by 44 percent from FY 2008 to FY 2012.[2] In addition, new felony convictions by persons on probation supervision have been reduced by 38 percent during the same time frame.[3] The use of risk assessments to prioritize and inform supervision activities and the corresponding allocation of resources by the adult county probation departments has become the norm and is becoming institutionalized as the way business is done in Arizona.[4] The Supreme Court of Arizona now identifies EBP as the business model in its ongoing strategic agendas of the court. This pronounced level of leadership and support from the court has enhanced our efforts and contributed significantly to their success.[5]

The State of Arizona Committee on Probation includes public members and other disciplines beyond probation experts. Logical members also include the United States probation chief as well as the Community Corrections Operations director from the ADOC. In 2012, the AOC began to discuss what topics would be included in the next round of EBP training for the county adult probation departments. Based on findings in our periodic Operational Reviews, a decision was made to focus in part on EBP-based officer skills. In addition, the county probation departments were requesting training in Motivational Interviewing. During discussions with the Adult Chief Probation Officers, it was determined that providing the EPICS II (Lowenkamp et al., 2010) training was our best option. A similar curriculum was evaluated in the federal system and those results persuaded us that this was the best option available. In addition, this curriculum would complement any future training in Motivational Interviewing. All the chiefs agreed that this was the logical next step for Arizona, given that we were approaching a second decade of work to implement EBP and realizing that line officers were the critical link in achieving additional reductions in recidivism.

From the involvement of United States Probation in the Arizona Committee on Probation, AOC learned that United States Probation in Arizona had begun the process

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[1] Additional information can be found at http://www.azcourts.gov/AZSupremeCourt/codeofjudicialadministration.aspx

[2] Additional information can be found at http://www.azcourts.gov/apsd/SafeCommunitiesAct.aspx

[3] Additional information can be found at http://www.azcourts.gov/apsd/SafeCommunitiesAct.aspx

[4] The juvenile probation system in Arizona has made major strides in this area as well. Their work in this area is not in the purview of this article.

[5] Additional information about the court's strategic plans can be found here: http://www.azcourts.gov/justice2020/Justice2020.aspx

of training their officers in STARR and had staff knowledgeable in EPICS II. The federal probation office in Arizona's experience and willingness to participate made them a welcome addition to the training the AOC began to plan; we concluded that their involvement could only enhance our efforts to reduce recidivism.

Evidence-Based Practices in United States Probation, District of Arizona

The steps that federal probation in Arizona has taken to implement evidence-based practices have been based on the leadership and direction of the Office of Probation and Pretrial Services (OPPS) of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AO) and guidance from the Criminal Law Committee of the Judicial Conference.

> The adoption of an evidence based philosophy requires the use of assessment tools; the development of supervision and programming options that are informed by evidence; the use of research; and the development of staff skills to support programming and service delivery. The supervision and programming principles derived from research, when implemented well, lead to a more efficient and effective system, maximizing the reduction in recidivism. (Hurtig & Lenart, 2011, p. 35)

The federal probation system has followed a blueprint that is based on three goals:

> "Educate all and provide a common foundation and understanding of EBP"; "Implementing an Actuarial Risk Assessment"; and "Teaching officers supervision skills that will have the greatest effect on reducing recidivism" (Hurtig & Lenart, 2011, p. 35).

To achieve the third goal of this EBP blueprint (teach officers supervision skills with the greatest effect on reducing recidivism), OPPS developed STARR (Lowenkamp, Robinson, VanBenschoten, & Alexander, 2009). While national training efforts are well under way, the District of Arizona was not selected as a participant for the first round of STARR training.

The District of Arizona probation system made an internal commitment in late 2012 to develop additional volunteer coaches (in addition to the OPPS STARR-trained coaches) to assist with the pending implementation of STARR in our district. We decided that we wanted to seek volunteers who were willing to become effective role models in their use of the skills associated with Core Correctional

Practice (CCP), Motivational Interviewing (MI), and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). To comply with OPPS directives regarding the use of the STARR curriculum by non-OPPS staff, federal probation in the District of Arizona used Effective Practices in Correctional Settings II (EPICS II).[6]

Our district determined to increase our coaching capacity to maximize our ability to effectively train more than 80 officers in STARR. We recognized from the experience of the nine OPPS STARR-trained coaches and the scope and nature of the curriculum that this endeavor was going to be significantly different from a conventional training program. Successful implementation of STARR would require a thorough evaluation of our allocation of resources. Even more important, we realized that this process would involve a fundamental shift in philosophy to a focus on promoting long-term change in the people we investigate and supervise (Bourgon, Gutierrez, & Ashton, 2011). This long-term change process centers around helping offenders understand that their behavior is a "…direct result of their thoughts alone and for no other reason" (Bourgon et al., 2011:36).

To form our group of USPO coaches, we conducted a series of detailed sessions for interested volunteers intended to give them a preview of what involvement in the coaches' development project would look like. That process included pre-session reading assignments and a discussion of the project objectives and planned training activities. After completing the preview process, participants were asked to volunteer if they were interested in becoming coaches. At the end of the recruitment process, 17 officers (including 3 from the presentence division) and 5 supervisors (including 1 from the presentence division) volunteered to learn, practice, and begin using the skill sets mentioned above (this group included the 9 OPPS STARR-trained coaches, 2 of whom are supervisors).

The Role of Coaching in this Project

While the intent of this article is not to fully describe all the theoretical underpinnings of the entire implementation process associated with this project, we think that some discussion of the coaching component of this project is warranted. In the context of staff development for teachers, Joyce & Showers (2002) found that conventional training (theory,

demonstration, practice time, and feedback) without post-instruction job-site coaching infrequently transfers into the day-to-day delivery of service. In the education field, post-training use of new practices occurred less than 10 percent of the time, without post-instruction on-site coaching. With post-instruction on-site coaching, the transfer rate to day-to-day delivery of service can reach 95 percent. More broadly, Alexander (2011) noted that post-instruction on-site coaching has consistently and broadly been demonstrated in a number of disciplines to be a necessary element for the transfer of a new skill to the workplace. It is clear that the involvement of coaches greatly enhances the learning process and therefore increases the transfer of these important skills to the point of service. Therefore, the role of the coach is critical to the successful implementation of this curriculum.

The Collaborative Training Event

In March 2013, the Adult Probation Services Division of the Arizona AOC planned, funded, and hosted the first of a series of training events (in progress) using the EPICS-II curriculum. This series of events is designed to build agency self-sufficiency to implement the skills contained in the training curriculum. The goal of this process is to build the internal capacity of each county adult probation agency so they can become self-sustaining in their ability to train officers in EPICS II. The first step of this process involves the training and development of internal coaches, who after demonstrating skill proficiency by the submission of recordings, will be integral in the subsequent training of other officers in their agencies. In addition, as described below, since the curriculum is being shared throughout the State of Arizona, the possibility exists for agencies to share their coaches as needed.

This event brought together participants from all of Arizona's 15 adult probation departments. Also in attendance were observers from governmental and nongovernmental stakeholder groups. Organizations in attendance included staff from the ADOC and representatives from the Judicial Education and Juvenile Justice Services Divisions of the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts.

The initial training included two days of classroom instruction, which included a significant portion of time devoted to skill-practice role plays. To assist the students (county adult probation officers) in learning the EPICS-II skills, coaches from United

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[6] The third author is certified as an EPICS-II trainer and coach.

States Probation Office (USPOs) from the District of Arizona coached the students during the practice of the skills during role play sessions. After the students completed their rehearsal of a skill during the training role plays, the USPO coaches then provided structured feedback on the students' use of the newly learned skills. During this process, the USPO coaches answered questions that the students posed about the use of the skills and offered encouragement intended to promote the students' learning.

After the two-day classroom portion of the training, the student officers participated in a three-part, one-on-one coaching session with one of the two training instructors. This comprised 1) addressing questions and concerns about the curriculum, 2) directly observing the students' use of a new skill with a person on supervision, and 3) debriefing and giving feedback following the observation.

For this coaching event, the student officers were observed using the skills in one-on-one sessions with a person on supervision whom the student did not actually supervise. In other jurisdictions where the same or similar training has taken place, the direct observation has involved the student officer rehearsing the skills with someone they supervise. Our adaptation involved the students conversing with a person on supervision with the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department. Specifically, these individuals were from Maricopa County's Drug Court program. Even the student officers from the Maricopa County Adult Probation Department were not paired with people they supervised. This adaptation was necessary given the significant travel times between the training site and the students' place of work.

Future training events will focus on developing coaches and trainers from all community corrections agencies in the State of Arizona.

What Did We Learn?

The progress made by both the state adult probation system and the United States Probation Office in Arizona in adopting EBPs provided an effective context for this project. The previously built foundation of collaboration led to the decision to work together on evidence-based officer skill training. Our different agencies share a common aim: to reduce recidivism. This gave us agreement on the scope and nature of the problem to be solved. The

stakeholders involved in the decision-making process believe that the selected training curriculum, EPICS II, provides a shared way for community corrections agencies at all levels to work on reducing recidivism. Based on our history of past successful collaboration, there was a high degree of open communication and consensus building, which made a successful training event possible.

In the one-on-one debriefings with the training instructors, the student officers reported that the involvement of the USPO coaches in the skills-practice role plays was extremely helpful. As a result of the structured feedback from the USPO coaches, the students reported that they were able to refine their rehearsal of the skills with each iteration of the role play. In addition, comments from student officers indicated that the presence of officers from other counties and the federal system created a heightened sense of the significance of the training project.

The debriefing process with the student officers also yielded another interesting theme: Student officers commented that they were less nervous practicing the skills during the "real play," since they did not have to worry as much about making a mistake in front of someone on supervision they would not see again.

When asked about working with the county officers, the USPO coaches reported that they were able to see progress from the students after each rehearsal, and on day two the improvement was even more pronounced. Several of the less-experienced USPO coaches indicated that the opportunity to coach students they did not directly work with made learning the feedback and coaching process less intimidating. The consensus of the group of USPOs was that their involvement in this training event enriched their own learning of the skills and their ability and confidence to eventually coach USPO peers.

Comments received from both the student officers and the USPO coaches regarding this event align with what was reported by Lowenkamp, Robinson, Koutsenok, Lowenkamp, and Pearl (2012). More specifically, coaching assisted student officers in understanding the skills, since they were able to resolve concerns and get answers to their questions. More important, the experience reduced their uncertainty about the value of the skills in general.

Moving Forward

Collaboration can maximize the impact of increasingly scarce resources and make it possible to learn vicariously from other organizations trying to solve similar problems. The shared vision of this ongoing project is to 1) train officers in evidence-based tools to reduce recidivism and 2) support and learn from our community corrections partners in Arizona as this skill acquisition moves forward. We have already begun to make that vision a reality. As agencies continue in this process, the ability to share resources—especially skilled coaches—will greatly enhance the learning process. That said, we believe it is important to keep in mind that our progress will directly depend on the level of adherence we have to "what works."

Research regarding the successful implementation of innovation clearly shows that the kind and extent of training are crucial. Alexander (2011) cites Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman and Wallace (2005) in cautioning that mandating changes in the correctional system, in and of itself, is ineffective. Further, research throughout many human-service disciplines consistently shows that simply providing information and a conventional approach to training will not cause sustained change.

The purpose of this article was not to add to the scholarly work that increasingly forms what we have referred to here as "what works." Instead, we are sharing our pursuit to apply that knowledge in a multi-jurisdictional project to enhance the evidence-based skills of community corrections officers in an effort to lower recidivism. We have learned much through this initial phase of our collaboration, and we are sure that new lessons await us. Going forward, as fiscal resources become increasingly scarce, we have the opportunity to creatively solve common problems with shared solutions based on evidence.

We conclude where we began this article: "From years of working with jurisdictions across the country, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has concluded that collaboration and rational planning are the keys to creating an effective criminal justice system." (McGarry & Ney, 2006, p. ix).

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Appendix

All 20 domains of the "Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory." Mattessich, P., Murray-Close, M., & Monsey, B. (2001). Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research.

History of collaboration or cooperation in the community

Collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community

Favorable political and social climate

Mutual respect, understanding, and trust

Appropriate cross section of members

Members see collaboration as in their self-interest

Ability to compromise

Members share a stake in both process and outcome

Multiple layers of participation

Flexibility

Development of clear roles and policy guidelines

Adaptability

Appropriate pace of development

Open and frequent communication

Established informal relationships and communication links

Concrete, attainable goals and objectives

Shared vision

Unique purpose

Sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time

Skilled leadership