

Promising Practices

How Three States Are Using Evidence to Build State Criminal Justice Policies

In today's Promising Practices we highlight three State Administering Agencies (SAAs) that have created internal programs and offices dedicated to promoting, maintaining and integrating evidence based policies and practices (EBPP) within their criminal justice systems.

The West Virginia Justice Center for Evidence-Based Practice

Housed in the newly formed Office of Research and Strategic Planning (ORSP), under the [Division of Justice and Community Services](#) (DCJS), the Justice Center for Evidence-Based Practice (JCEBP) will enhance the work of the DJCS by supporting research, effective planning/coordination and the use evidence for informed decisions making. The focus of the Center's work includes: synthesis of current research, the translation of studies and data into resources for policymakers, education and training on EBPPs, and working with all levels of the West Virginia criminal justice system to help integrate evidence based policies and practices into their work.

"We decided to invest in-house resources as the best way to assure that our grant programs have access to the expertise to improve the performance of sub-grants. In addition, we believe that helping our sister state agencies improve outcomes benefits the entire state," explained J. Norbert Federspiel, director of the West Virginia Division of Community and Justice Services.

Although the Center is not yet fully operational, in 2010 it received dedicated state funding for three full time employees and should be fully staffed by July 2011. These employees will work closely with the Criminal Justice Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) which is also under the ORSP. By having the new Justice Center aligned with the SAC, the ORSP hopes to not only provide training and technical assistance, but also work closely with its criminal justice partners around assessment and evaluation. This internal policy should result in a single office that will be able to provide the West Virginia's criminal justice community with a one-stop-shop, for research, training, technical assistance and evaluation of current, promising and evidence based practices.

Led by Dr. Stephen M. Haas, the ORSP and the Justice Center for Evidence Based Practices has begun working on integrating evidence based risk and needs based assessment tools into the work of multiple state programs. In particular Dr. Haas and the staff from JCEBP plan to integrate the [Level of Service/Case Management Inventory](#) into the entire spectrum of the West Virginia criminal justice system from community corrections programs to

adult and juvenile institutions. Dr. Haas hopes that by integrating this validated assessment tool throughout the criminal justice arena, decision makers will make more informed conclusions while also increasing communication between criminal justice agencies who will now be utilizing the same terminology and assessment tool.

[Pennsylvania's Resource Center for Evidence-Based Prevention and Intervention Programs and Practices](#)

Housed within the [Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency](#) (PCCD) the Resource Center for Evidence-Based Prevention and Intervention Programs and Practices grew out of the PCCD's commitment to both the [Communities That Care Model \(CTC\)](#) and the implementation of evidence based practices throughout Pennsylvania. As reported in a previous *Justice Bulletin* article the PCCD's use of the CTC led to the implementation of over 100 evidence based program sites throughout the state. In 2008, recognizing the need for increased training and technical assistance the PCCD created the Resource Center.

The creation and success of the Resource Center for Evidence-Based Prevention and Intervention Programs and Practices has required both political and programmatic buy-in from a number of key state partners including the Department of Public Welfare, the Juvenile Court Judges Commission, The Department of Education, and The Department of Health. By utilizing these relationships the Resource Center is able to work with programs, institutions and staff outside the purview of the PCCD.

The state funded Resource Center is comprised of two separate and distinct components: the Evidence-Based Prevention & Intervention Support Center (EPIS Center) and The Quality Improvement Initiative (Qii). The EPIS Center, which is run in partnership with the [Pennsylvania State University Prevention Research Center](#), was created to support established evidence based programs and newly founded evidence based program models. The EPIS Center supports these programs by providing communities and program sites with training, technical assistance, support with implementation and follow up support regarding program fidelity. The EPIS Center also provides communities and programs with technical assistance surrounding program selection, program start-up, outcome measurement, quality assurance, and data management and reporting. The Resource Center currently focuses on helping communities with the following evidence based programming:

- [The Incredible Years](#)*
- [Multisystemic Therapy](#)*
- [Functional Family Therapy](#)*
- [Strengthening Families Program 10-14](#)
- [Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies \(PATHS\)](#)*
- [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program](#)*
- [Project Towards No Drug Abuse](#)*
- [Big Brothers Big Sisters](#)*
- [Life Skills Training Program](#)*
- [Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care](#)*

Starred * items are [Blueprints Model Programs](#)

The second component of Resource Center is The Quality Improvement

Initiative (Qii) which is run in partnership with the [National Center for Juvenile Justice](#). The Qii works with home grown programs to improve interventions through research, training, strategic planning, program audits and assistance with output and outcome measurement. The Qii project was designed to help programs and intervention strategies utilize the best available research, tools and knowledge to improve the work they are already doing in communities across Pennsylvania. The Qii is both comprehensive and scalable with the ability to provide a multitude of services that run the gamut of quality improvement.

[Colorado's Evidence Based Practices Implementation for Capacity](#)

Housed in the [Colorado Department of Public Safety](#), the Evidence Based Practices Implementation for Capacity (EPIC) program is a multi-agency EBPP capacity building program. Started with a \$2.1 million in Byrne Justice Assistance Grant funds, EPIC seeks to build the capacity of all agencies, public and private, within the criminal justice system through the dissemination and utilization of evidence based modalities.

“Offenders who recycle through the justice system are a major drain on resources. Yet, for years, we have not incorporated the basic lessons of successful behavior modification into this system. Evidence continues to show that a key component of success is the connection between a case-worker and an offender. This training project gives criminal justice professionals the tools to work with offenders more effectively and establishes internal supports and coaching to reinforce these methods over the long term,” said Jeanne Smith, director of the Division of Criminal Justice in the Colorado Department of Public Safety.

Instead of supporting the creation of new programs or interventions, EPIC provides the Colorado criminal justice system with new evidence based skill sets by training practitioners and managers in evidence based practices like [Motivational Interviewing](#) (MI) and [Mental Health First Aid](#) (MHFA). Although these are not programs, both are distinctive client centered skills that can be used to dramatically enhance communication while also changing the way individuals communicate and work with client/offender populations. To date, EPIC has trained 544 people. Many of these trainings were "train the trainer" sessions who after intensive coaching and follow up, can be tasked with training their respective agencies.

In addition to the use of evidence based tools like MI and MHFA, EPIC provides intensive training, coaching and follow up services to all elements of the criminal justice system including, corrections, parole, probation, behavioral health and community correction. Instead of training staff by department, EPIC solicited requests from agencies to send groups of employees for training alongside members of other departments, the private sector and the non-profit sector. By holding intensive multi-step trainings with participants from across the criminal justice spectrum, EPIC works to enhance communication by helping participants build relationships across agencies. EPIC Program Manager Diane Pasini-Hill explained, “our mission is to create institutional change within the whole criminal justice system, not just install a program.” This goal of creating change within the institutional cultures of criminal justice organizations is further evidenced by the programs use of what it calls change agents.

Change Agents are individual supervisors and/or line staff inside each department selected as champions within their agency who will be groomed to to train, coach and provide feedback to subordinates and/or coworkers in order to implement and sustain motivational interviewing at a much deeper level than training alone could accomplish. These change agents are chosen both by the agencies and by EPIC staff from within the ongoing training classes. These individuals are then trained to become ambassadors for evidence based service delivery within their respective agencies. This level of inter-agency coordination and participation is possible because of the considerable amount of political buy in from individuals, institutions and commissions like the Colorado Commission on Crime and Juvenile Justice. Although the EPIC program is in its foundational years it has already received additional state funding and plans to have full implementation of the Motivational Interviewing technique in the coming years.

The programs described above all represent a shift from reliance solely on outside experts to having internal subject matter experts and a state driven commitment to utilizing evidence based practices and programs. As policymakers around the country continue to see and understand the potential for using EBPP's to decrease crime, victimization and criminal justice expenditures, other states may soon adopt similar programs. With the sobering budget realities of the coming years the work of state level centers for evidence based practices provide a blueprint for not only continuing the success of state programs but protecting the investments of time and energy that have already gone into changing the way that criminal justice systems use resources, see research and evaluation and react to new and innovative ways of protecting the public.