

EPIC Recommendation to the Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice

June 15, 2012

FY13-EPIC1 Permanently fund EPIC (Evidence-Based Practices Implementation for Capacity) for the purposes of sustainability and expansion statewide.

Recommendation

The General Assembly should invest in EPIC as an evidence-based initiative that is consistent with the Commission’s mandate to focus on “*evidence-based recidivism reduction initiatives and the cost-effective expenditure of limited criminal justice funds.*” Permanent funding ensures the expansion of EPIC statewide, and would expand training to local justice agencies.

Discussion

This skill building initiative began as a result of Commission recommendations to expand professional training in the juvenile and criminal justice systems and to expand the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) for the purposes of reducing recidivism. EPIC is a collaborative effort among the Departments of Public Safety, Corrections, Human Services, and the Judicial Branch to increase skill levels of those who work with the offender population. EPIC consists of a team of eight professionals, and trainers who coach and facilitate “communities of practice” to change the way supervising officers and prison staff interact with offenders. EPIC uses methods from the field of implementation science to train practitioners in Motivational Interviewing (MI) and Mental Health First Aid and will soon begin to train on the Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI), a needs assessment tool used across agencies in Colorado. The EPIC model seeks to marry EBPs with effective implementation practices to enhance the likelihood of sustainable change of both the practitioner and ultimately the offender.

Motivational interviewing has been widely studied and is considered an evidence-based practice. EPIC’s focus on MI is strategic in that it acts as a gateway skill set to enhance the effectiveness of other complementary EBPs. In fact, MI was selected as the initial intervention to be disseminated across agencies because of its focus on foundational communication skills and its ability to strategically elicit and focus on conversations that address criminogenic need (criminogenic needs are those problem areas that lead to criminal behavior). This approach, based on years of research, is based on its substantial success in the medical and addictions fields.

EPIC began with grant funds from the U.S. Department of Justice and in three years has trained and coached over 2,000 professionals from dozens of agencies in probation, parole, behavioral health, and community corrections. Staff from 10 prisons are also involved in EPIC. The training provides professionals with new knowledge and skills to enhance the offender’s willingness to engage in the process of personal change. Deciding to change lifestyle behaviors and personal attitudes and beliefs that lead to criminal behavior is critical to prevent a return to criminal behavior. Trainees learn to work with offenders to help them identify problems and help them seek opportunities to change. Trainees also learn to work with offenders’ ambivalence about the change process.