

Washington State Institute for Criminal Justice Research:

Research in Brief



EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES PROVISO

Christopher Campbell



Background: Following the passage of Senate Bill 5034¹, the Washington State Department of Corrections (WADOC) was authorized funds with the proviso that an expert consultant be hired to ensure that programs offered to offenders throughout the state are based in empirical evidence and follow the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model. In response to this evidence-based practices proviso (EBPP), WADOC hired the Washington State Institute for Criminal Justice Research (WS-ICJR) as the consultant for this project. As per the proviso, WS-ICJR would work with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to identify programs that are evidence-based, research-based, promising practice, and ineffective, or those that should be phased-out. To fulfill the proviso, WS-ICJR was asked to complete and provide four specific deliverables to the legislature: (1) Program Discovery, (2) Program Description, (3) Program Categorization, and (4) Implementation of Recommendations.

CURRENT PROGRESS

Deliverable 1: Program Discovery

Working directly with WADOC, the WS-ICJR created a database listing all offender programs offered across Washington. The database includes the institutional and community correctional facilities that implement the programs, the manner in which the programs are currently administered, the legislative funding status of the programs, and the current selection criteria and enrollment of the programs' participants.

Deliverable 2: Program Description

Upon completion of the initial database, the WS-ICJR then sought to identify programs that are evidence-based, research-based, promising, and ineffective. Using meta-analytic findings completed by WSIPP in conjunction with an extensive literature review, the WS-ICJR identified specific components (target population, intended outcome of the program, and evidence of impact) of evidence-based programs in the following categories:

- Offender Change Programs:
 - o Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - o Substance Abuse Treatment
 - o Sex Offender Treatment
 - o Therapeutic Communities
- Case Management
- Correctional Education
- Community Supervision
- Vocational Training

FUTURE STEPS

After isolating specific program components found to be effective at reducing recidivism, WS-ICJR will examine the components of the Washington program database. Here each program's manual and WADOC policy will be broken down for specific intent and population served. These components will be cross-referenced for evidence-based components.

Additional efforts in this deliverable will be made to isolate the implementation of programs by WADOC. This will be completed via survey and contact with program staff at each facility. Utilizing

¹ House Bill Companion 1057. Each effective as of June 30, 2013.



elements noted in the literature as proxies of quality assurance and program fidelity, this survey provides a snapshot of the current program implementation in Washington. The results of the survey will supplement the component list.

Deliverable 3: Program Categorization

In collaboration with WSIPP researchers, WS-ICJR will then categorize WADOC programs as evidence-based, research-based, promising practice, or ineffective to be phased out. This will form the “Repository of Evidence” where program, their components, and complementary literature will be matched an accessible. A final report will be issued to the legislature as recommendations to strengthen or phase out programs.

Deliverable 4: Implementation of Recommendations

Stemming from the report, WADOC and WS-ICJR will work collaboratively to develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen the delivery of evidence-based programming and phase out programs. Once developed, WS-ICJR will oversee the implementation of the plan as well as its subsequent process evaluation, taking place approximately one year following the plan’s completion.

EBPP Definitions²

(1) Evidence-Based Program

- *Tested in heterogeneous or intended populations with multiple randomized and/or statistically-controlled evaluations, or one large multiple-site randomized and/or statistically-controlled evaluation, where the weight of the evidence from a systematic review demonstrates sustained improvements in reducing recidivism.*

(2) Research-Based Program

- *Tested with a single randomized and/or statistically-controlled evaluation demonstrating sustained desirable outcomes; or where the weight of the evidence from a systematic review supports sustained outcomes as identified in the term “evidence-based” but does not meet the full criteria for “evidence-based”.*

(3) Promising Practice

- *A program or practice that, based on statistical analyses or a well-established theory of change, shows potential for meeting the “evidence-based” or “research-based” criteria, which could include the use of a program that is evidence-based for outcomes other than the alternative use.*

(4) Ineffective / Phase-Out

- *Any program that does not fulfill the criteria of any other category and costs the state resources, or is found to have iatrogenic effects.*

² From WSIPP 2013 report: *Inventory of Evidence-Based, Research-Based, and Promising Practices*, http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1373/Wsipp_