

How EBP Can Reduce Recidivism and Improve Outcomes in Community Corrections

With growing caseloads and shrinking budgets, corrections departments and programs across the country are being challenged to find new ways to do more with their limited resources. Prisons and jails are becoming increasingly reliant on community corrections to alleviate overcrowding and provide adequate supervision and treatment services to help justice-involved individuals reintegrate while keeping their communities safe. With the need for innovative and cost-effective methods to reduce criminal recidivism, where should community corrections turn?

Years of behavioral research has uncovered the components that make up the most effective community corrections programs, and evidence-based practices (EBP) embody the core of this research. EBP combines empirical research with client behavioral data to guide corrections officers in the decision-making process and have the greatest positive impact on client outcomes. Governed by eight guiding principles and backed by science, EBP provides the baseline for effective intervention for justice-involved populations.

For example, when correctional rehabilitation programs appropriately match services and treatment to the risk and need profiles of clients, they can be 15-20% more effective at reducing criminal recidivism. This includes applying swift, certain, and fair rewards for accomplishments, as well as sanctions for program violations.

However, many corrections departments lack the resources, capacity, and expertise to adequately integrate EBP into their daily business practices. This “gap in EBP” creates barriers to implementation, often resulting in corrections departments to continue “business as usual” with strained budgets and ineffective programs.

Fortunately, new technology, detailed implementation guides, and extensive training for officers are helping pave the way for corrections departments to successfully integrate EBP into their daily decision making and client supervision and treatment programs.

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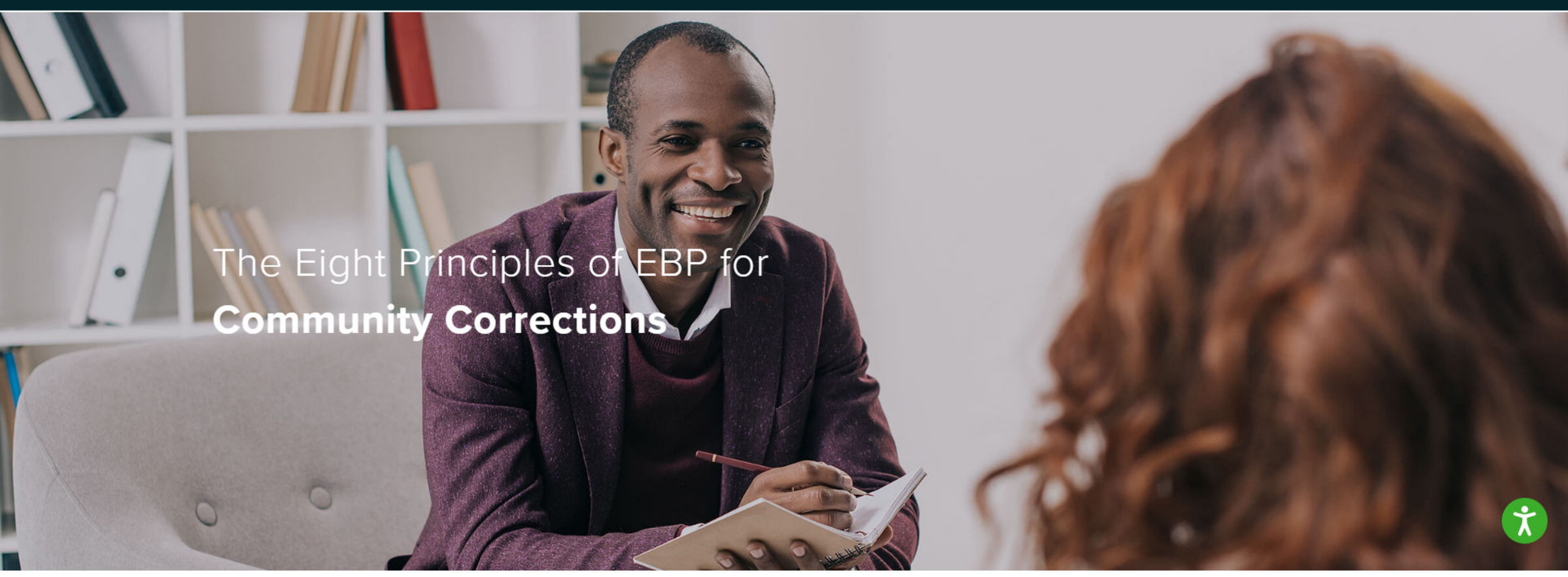
The Eight Principles of EBP for Community Corrections

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The Eight Principles of EBP for **Community Corrections**

A Framework for Better Outcomes and Recidivism Reduction

Evidence-Based Practices consist of eight principles to help guide effective intervention within the community corrections space. Research shows that combining the concepts of each principle results in a greater likelihood of reducing criminal recidivism.

1. ASSESS ACTUARIAL RISK AND NEED

Not every program or intervention works for every client. In fact, providing too much, too little, or the wrong kind of treatment services can not only fail to improve client and program outcomes but can make them worse. A successful intervention must begin with an assessment of the individual to determine their unique needs and risks and the best course of action to take to effectively reduce criminal behaviors.

2. ENHANCE INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

For lasting and effective behavior change to occur, corrections officers must help facilitate a strong internal motivation within the client. Environmental factors, negative influences, and poor relationships can all adversely affect interventions. Research shows that motivational interviewing and sensitive and constructive interpersonal communication from officers can help increase intrinsic motivation in clients and help initiate and maintain lasting behavior change.

3. TARGET INTERVENTIONS

Studies have found that the best outcomes in the criminal justice system are achieved when the intensity of supervision is matched to a client's risk for recidivism (criminogenic risk), or likelihood of failure in rehabilitation (prognostic risk), and when corrections and treatment programs are focused on the specific disorders or conditions that predispose an individual to criminal behavior (criminogenic needs). Assessment and screening tools based on risk, need, and responsivity (RNR) principles can provide the best insight on a client's risk and need levels to properly match them to interventions and supervision regimens.

4. SKILL TRAIN WITH DIRECTED PRACTICE

To influence a client's behavior change, it is imperative that corrections officers communicate effectively and teach clients the skills they need to be successful, such as problem-solving, regulating emotions, and redirecting anti-social thinking. Corrections programs using cognitive-behavioral treatment methods in both group and one-on-one sessions through role-playing and positive reinforcement are proven to help reduce criminal recidivism.

5. INCREASE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Positive reinforcement is the key to influencing successful behavior change—delivering rewards, affirmations, and incentives for accomplishments encourages clients to adopt prosocial attitudes. Swift and certain sanctions for infractions must still be used when appropriate, but a focus on positive over negative reinforcement better supports long-term behavior change and successful reentry into the community.

6. ENGAGE ON-GOING SUPPORT IN NATURAL COMMUNITIES

In order for clients to maintain positive behavior change, a strong support system and meaningful connections within their natural communities (significant others, family members, mentors, employers, teachers, spiritual leaders, etc.) can help reinforce prosocial attitudes and enhance motivation to change. By engaging with people that already exhibit positive, law-abiding behaviors, clients are more likely to adopt these attitudes and are less likely to recidivate.

7. MEASURE RELEVANT PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

In order to determine if a client is making progress in their treatment, a formal way to measure their progress—such as decreases in technical violations or number of cognitive-behavioral therapy hours—is integral in determining if the interventions are working or if the client's supervision plan needs to be adjusted. It's also important that corrections officers and treatment staff are regularly evaluated to ensure that they are following the program criteria and supporting client success.

8. PROVIDE MEASUREMENT FEEDBACK

Once measurement processes are in place, providing routine feedback to clients regarding their progress encourages accountability and continued compliance in their program or treatment. Regular client case reviews also help corrections officers support the ultimate goal of reducing criminal recidivism.

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Realizing the EBP Gap in **Community Corrections**

Identifying the Challenges for Successful EBP Implementation

As community corrections departments are being challenged to do more with less, it can seem like an insurmountable task to implement evidence-based practices into their daily decision-making processes. Successfully integrating EBP into existing programs is almost impossible without technology, and can quickly drain departmental resources.

BUDGETARY AND RESOURCE RESTRAINTS

Because many corrections departments and agencies are juggling shrinking budgets and dwindling resources, there isn't much left for expensive staff training or lengthy implementation procedures. Decision support technology may be one of the most cost-effective solutions when it comes to true EBP integration.

INCREASING CASELOADS

With growing caseloads due to jail depopulation, decriminalization, and more, officers also have the challenge of finding the time to properly assess and manage each client uniquely and individually. In fact, workload studies find that line officers spend between one-third and one-half of their time on administrative duties, leaving less time for them to spend on training, education, and supervising clients. Without the help of technology to streamline caseload management and reduce clerical work, corrections officers may struggle with properly integrating EBP into their workload.

EBP EDUCATION

Many community corrections departments, local courts, and agencies may lack the capacity and knowledge of EBP to correctly and successfully apply these principles to their existing programs. Successful implementation often requires staff training to ensure that they are following the EBP principles and making informed and unbiased decisions. Without proper training or decision-support technology, officers and staff can easily misinterpret EBP concepts and may act in ways that misalign with departmental policies.

ADJUSTING BUSINESS PRACTICES

A shortage of resources is not the only barrier to successful EBP implementation, but the challenge of changing the way decision making, processes, program criteria, and more, are done on a day-to-day basis. Corrections officers and staff may need to fundamentally shift their way of thinking and conducting business to fall in line with the EBP model. Emerging decision support technology can help officers consistently and efficiently incorporate EBP concepts into their daily tasks and better measure program success and client outcomes.

However, these barriers and challenges do not necessarily reflect corrections program philosophies or intent. Studies indicate that probation and parole officers are increasingly open to learning about and adopting evidence-based practices. But to truly close this gap, the only way for corrections departments to successfully implement EBP is with the use of some form of technology.

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A Bridge to Better Program and Client Outcomes

Despite a multitude of barriers that corrections departments may face, studies show that probation and parole officers are increasingly open to adopting evidence-based practices into their programs.

REDUCE RECIDIVISM BY AUTOMATING CORRECTIONS PROGRAM PLACEMENT

With caseloads commonly ranging from fifty to several hundred probationers, officers may struggle to find time to perform all of their duties while simultaneously managing each individual client. Because of this, low- and high-risk clients may be placed in the same treatment programs, which can have a negative effect on their success and ultimately increase recidivism.

But emerging technology and software, like **SCRAM Nexus**, can help streamline case management by automatically calculating each individual client's risk- and need-levels based on their demographics, criminal history, program progress, and more, and provide officers with automated recommendations on supervision regimens and program adjustments. SCRAM Nexus also keeps all client data—program attendance, monitoring compliance data, drug test results, and more—in one place for all officers and external service providers to access at any time, removing the need for disparate case management systems.

INCREASE CLIENT SUCCESS WITH SUGGESTED REWARDS AND SANCTIONS

While educational and training programs can be effective at teaching EBP to corrections officers, knowledge acquisition degrades rapidly and rarely translates into real-world application. SCRAM Nexus takes the "guesswork" and bias out of decision making, by automatically providing pertinent responses to a client's behaviors. Using algorithms that combine EBP with existing departmental policies, appropriate rewards and sanctions are generated for officers to swiftly act on to create the most impactful client outcomes.

IMPROVE PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS

SCRAM Nexus is also able to help community corrections departments analyze their program's performance by aggregating information from various sources including program data (e.g., units of service delivered, frequency of drug testing) and client outcomes (e.g., drug test results, counseling attendance, technical violations) and create actionable KPIs to use to increase program effectiveness.

Community corrections departments and officers face the challenge of shifting their way of thinking and managing their caseloads to follow EBP principles. Failing to apply evidence-based principles faithfully and appropriately can increase criminal recidivism, waste precious resources, and worsen other psychosocial outcomes. But decision support software platforms, such as SCRAM Nexus, are specifically programmed to monitor client performance continuously and automatically recommend ongoing service adjustments where indicated, closing the gap for corrections departments to successfully implement EBP into their programs.

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