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TECHNICAL
R E P O R T

Los Angeles County
Juvenile Justice
Crime Prevention Act

RAND Quarterly Report,
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with

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Prepared for the Los Angeles County Probation Department



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SUMMARY

This document is the second quarterly progress report for the evaluation of Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) programs for the Los Angeles County Probation Department. It focuses on technical assistance to JJCPA home-based-program service providers identified by the County and site-visited by RAND staff using the Correctional Program Checklist (CPC). This report covers the period from July 1, 2008, through September 30, 2008.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The intent of this report is to provide Probation and the community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide services to JJCPA programs with advice, recommendations, and guidance in building sustainable juvenile programs, ultimately elevating program standards.

SITE VISITS TO SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR THE JJCPA HIGH-RISK HIGH-NEEDS PROGRAM

In July 2008, RAND Corporation staff conducted CPC assessments of five service providers for the home-based component of the JJCPA High-Risk High-Needs (HRHN) program.¹ These site visits are part of RAND's ongoing evaluation of JJCPA activities through the Los Angeles County Probation Department. The department selected the service providers to be evaluated.

The objective of these assessments was to conduct a detailed review of the home-based program services and materials in order to compare current practice with the literature on best practices in corrections. More specifically, these assessments determine a baseline from which to assess whether the treatment interventions were consistent with the research literature on evidence-based practices and the principles of effective intervention. The CPC was conducted to provide Probation and the CBOs with advice, recommendations, and guidance for future contracting and a way to elevate future program standards.

¹ The HRHN program also includes an employment component.

THE CORRECTIONAL PROGRAM CHECKLIST

Probation staff and RAND staff mutually agreed that the instrument to be used for the site visits would be the CPC, a tool developed to assess correctional intervention programs.² It is used to ascertain how closely correctional programs adhere to the principles of effective intervention. Several recent studies conducted by the University of Cincinnati on both adult and juvenile programs were used to develop and validate the indicators included in the CPC.³ These studies yielded strong outcome correlations among individual items, domain scores, and overall scores (Holsinger, 1999; Lowenkamp and Latessa, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Lowenkamp, 2004).

The CPC is divided into two basic areas: capacity and content. The capacity area is designed to measure whether a correctional program has the capability to deliver evidence-based interventions and services for offenders. There are three domains in this area: (1) leadership and development, (2) staff characteristics, and (3) quality assurance. The content area focuses on the substantive domains of offender assessment and treatment. The CPC includes a total of 77 items worth up to 83 total points (some items are weighted). It should be noted that not all of the five domains are given equal weight and that some items may be considered not applicable, in which case they are not included in the scoring. Each area and all domains are scored and rated as highly effective (65–100 percent), effective (55–64 percent), needs improvement (46–54 percent), or ineffective (45 percent or less). Table 1.1 lists the domains evaluated by the CPC and the items evaluated within each domain.

² This section uses template language provided to RAND for the write-up of the CPC description and format for results. We provide clarifying information for the current evaluation in footnotes. Template language is from Sleyo and Smith (2007) and the Utah Criminal Justice Center (2007).

The CPC is modeled after the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI), developed by Gendreau and Andrews (1996); however, the CPC includes a number of items not contained in the CPAI. In addition, items that were not found to be positively correlated with recidivism were deleted.

³ These studies involved more than 40,000 offenders (both adult and juvenile) and more than 400 correctional programs, ranging from institutional to community-based. All of the studies are available from the University of Cincinnati (undated). A large part of this research involved identifying program characteristics that were correlated with outcomes.

Table S.1

Areas Evaluated by the Correctional Program Checklist

| <i>Area</i> | <i>Domain</i> | <i>Item Evaluated</i> |
|-------------|----------------------------|---|
| Capacity | Leadership and Development | Qualifications and involvement of the program director Initial design of the program |
| | Staff Characteristics | Qualifications, experience, stability, training, supervision, and involvement of program staff |
| | Quality Assurance | Internal and external quality-assurance mechanisms used to monitor how well the program is functioning |
| Content | Offender Assessment | Selection of offenders for services (i.e., inclusion and exclusion criteria) Assessment of risk, need, and responsiveness factors |
| | Treatment | Types of treatment used to target criminogenic behaviors Specific treatment procedures Use of positive reinforcement and punishment Methods used to train offenders in new prosocial skills Provision and quality of aftercare services |

Several limitations to the CPC should be noted. First, as with any research process, objectivity and reliability are an issue. Although steps are taken to ensure that the information collected is reliable and accurate, given the nature of the process, the assessor invariably makes judgments about the data gathered.⁴ Second, the process is time-specific. That is, the assessment is based on how the program is functioning at the time the assessment is conducted. Changes or modifications may be planned for the

⁴ These judgments might include reconciling conflicting sources of information in order to make assessments or basing assessments on imperfect sources. For instance, assessment of community support for the programs is based almost entirely on the perspective of CBO staff members, as program materials yield no relevant information here. Further, this information is secondhand, as community members are not surveyed to corroborate these responses.

future or may be under consideration; however, only those activities and processes that are present at the time of the review are considered in the scoring. Third, the process does not take into account all the system issues that can affect program integrity. Lastly, the process does not address the reasons that a problem exists within a program.⁵

Despite these limitations, there are a number of advantages to CPC assessments. First, the criteria are based on empirically derived principles of effective intervention. Second, the process provides a measure of program integrity and quality; it provides insight into the “black box” of a program—something an outcome study alone does not provide. Third, the results can be obtained relatively quickly. Fourth, it identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention. It provides the program with feedback on what it is doing that is consistent with the research on effective interventions, as well as those areas that need improvement. Fifth, it provides some recommendations for program improvement. Finally, it allows for comparisons with other programs that have been assessed using the same criteria. Since program integrity and quality can change over time, it allows a program to reassess its progress at a later date.

Norm Information

Researchers at the University of Cincinnati have assessed more than 400 programs nationwide and have developed a large database on correctional intervention programs. Approximately 7 percent of the programs assessed have been classified as highly effective, 18 percent as effective, 33 percent as needs improvement, and 42 percent as ineffective.

Assessment Process

The assessment process consisted of a series of structured interviews conducted with staff members in July 2008 during on-site visits to the five CBOs that provide home-

⁵ For example, funding constraints or program capacity issues might preclude the execution of one or more program components. Although these factors are addressed in isolation, they are not taken into account when assessing other aspects of program delivery.

In addition to limitations of the CPC tool itself, there are transferability issues with the applicability of the CPC to home-based programs. There are certain obstacles in administering this tool to the specific Los Angeles County Probation Department programs that were selected for review. Specifically, the individualized, home-based nature of the programs selected rendered CPC criteria that focused on group services difficult to assess. This limitation is common with standardized instruments, which are designed for the assessment of a wide range of programs.

based services. Additionally, data were gathered by examining representative case files (for both open and closed cases) and other relevant materials. Data from the various sources were then combined to generate a consensus CPC score for each of the five providers.⁶ Scores for the five service providers were then averaged to determine the overall CPC score for each of the domains evaluated.

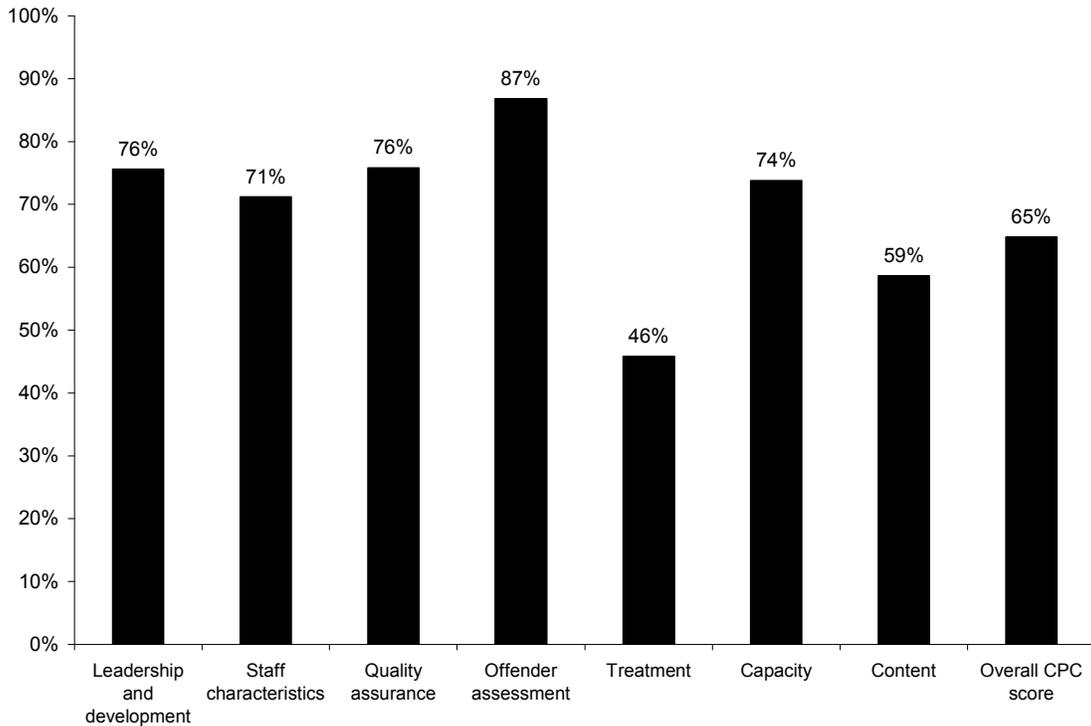
SUMMARY OF JJCPA SITE-VISIT FINDINGS

Figure S.1 shows the average evaluations in each of the five domains, as well as totals for each area (capacity and content) and overall CPC score.

⁶ The site visits, as well as the program reporting, used materials and templates supplied by the University of Cincinnati and the Utah State Courts (Sleyo and Smith, 2007; Utah Criminal Justice Center, 2007). RAND was asked to use the templates provided, with minor style modifications made for the current service providers evaluated.

Figure S.1

Summary of Site Visit Findings for Five Sites Combined



NOTES: CPC ratings are grouped into highly effective (65–100 percent), effective (55–64 percent), needs improvement (46–54 percent), or ineffective (45 percent or less).

Overall, three of the five visited CBO sites were rated highly effective, while two were rated effective. Four sites were rated highly effective in their capacity total, while only one was rated highly effective in content. All five sites were rated effective or highly effective in staff characteristics, and four were rated effective or highly effective in program leadership and development.

Quality assurance was rated highly effective at three sites and effective at two, due to their inclusion in the JJCPA evaluation. Treatment characteristics were rated ineffective at two sites, needs improvement at two sites, and effective at one site.

Three sites scored highest in the domain of offender assessment—all five were rated highly effective—due to the Probation-administered Los Angeles Risk and

Resiliency Checkup (LARRC), which is used to determine risk and needs scores for program participants.

None of the sites had a method for piloting new program components, with all sites citing the restricted nature of their contracts with Probation as a barrier to piloting new program components.

Recommendations

Our recommendations below target the areas where the service providers need to make improvements based on the CPC:

- CBO directors should have an educational and experiential background related to the services that the CBO provides and should be conversant with the principles on which the JJCPA program is based.
- All staff should have prior experience in providing services to probationers and at-risk youth.
- Staff should be given regular training that includes the theoretical basis for the program, as well as techniques to be employed in providing program services that are tailored to youth needs.
- Programs that incorporate social learning need to ensure that they follow standard model components.
- Staff should be given clear guidelines on any positive or negative sanctions utilized in the program as well as program completion criteria.
- Staff should have regularly scheduled clinical supervision.
- Probation needs to work with CBOs to develop a protocol for piloting program modifications as part of the CBOs' contract to provide JJCPA program services to Probation.
- Probation should share recidivism data with the providers to allow them to assess their effectiveness in reducing the number repeat offenders.
- At all five sites, treatment characteristics were rated lowest of the five domains. The processes that Probation is using—assessment and quality assurance—have a positive effect on CPC scores, but the treatment characteristics of the sites themselves are still falling short.