



September 2017

Using Translational Tools to Reduce Recidivism in Hidalgo County, Texas

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IMPROVING PRACTICE

CASE STUDIES
FROM THE FIELD

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Implementation of effective supervision is enhanced when supervisors of the agency serve as quality assurance experts. This reinforces quality supervision and helps reduce recidivism.
- ▶ A jurisdictional gap analyses can identify needed programs to reduce recidivism based on the characteristics of the probationers in the population.
- ▶ Community corrections line staff need opportunities to learn and practice effective supervision techniques to enhance working with probationers.

Message From the Director

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) is committed to advancing the practices of justice organizations by embracing and implementing evidence-informed practices. Evidence-informed practices use research findings of policies, interventions, treatments, practices, or programs that reduce crime, violence, drug use and/or recidivism. The advantages of using evidence-informed practices are that justice and treatment agencies are more likely to achieve their mission and goals and keep offenders off the streets and our communities safer. Research studies are a vital tool in assisting justice organizations to learn about operations and practices that improve the administration of justice and deliver better outcomes. However, a major challenge that many justice organizations face is distilling the research literature into the key components of operations that can be adjusted to embrace evidence-informed practices, treatments, and/or programs. Translating research into key components where daily work can be aligned with the research findings is challenging.

Through the Encouraging Innovation: Field-Initiated grant series, BJA has funded the development of tools to advance the uptake and use of effective practices. Two of these tools are featured in this case study of the Hidalgo County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD). The Hidalgo County CSCD project used two translational tools: an eLearning system—Skills for Offender Assessment and Responsivity in New Goals (SOARING2)—and the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Simulation Tool. SOARING2 is designed to educate justice personnel and treatment providers in the skills to use evidence-based practices, which is coupled with onsite coaching to facilitate use of the skills in everyday practice. And the RNR Simulation Tool is designed to provide decision support services to advance the use of evidence-based practices by linking probationers to appropriate services. Collectively, the translational tools assisted CSCD to implement evidence-based practices with adherence to the core principles. This is the second in BJA’s Series of Innovative Case Studies From the Field.

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This project was supported by Grant Nos. 2009-DG-BX-K026 and 2010-DB-BX-K077 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Introduction

Beginning in 2012, George Mason University's Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!) and the Hidalgo County (Texas) Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD) collaborated to implement evidence-based practices for probation supervision. This project involved the use of special translational tools for justice professionals. Translational tools help agencies convert research evidence into operational practice in using assessment information in case planning, referring individuals to treatment based on their needs and risk factors and appropriateness of the programs, and monitoring supervision. The Hidalgo County project used two translational tools: an eLearning system called Skills for Offender Assessment and Responsivity in New Goals (SOARING2) and the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Simulation Tool. The SOARING2 eLearning system is designed to educate justice personnel and treatment providers in the skills to use evidence-based practices. It is coupled with onsite internal coaching to facilitate use of the skills in everyday practice. The RNR Simulation Tool is designed to provide decision support services to advance the use of evidence-based practices by linking probationers to appropriate services.

Background

Translational tools are designed to transform research into material supporting the daily decisions of judges, probation officers, case managers, prison officials, treatment providers, defenders, or other justice/treatment personnel. The tools have three goals:

- 1) Educate the user about the research pertinent to their job.
- 2) Guide decisions about referring individuals to appropriate programs and services.
- 3) Synthesize data, either available through a database or provided by a practitioner, giving targeted feedback regarding the use of evidence-based practices and/or the features of the program or system.

Translational tools go beyond educating the population to decision-support activities designed for key justice and/or treatment decisions, because they can transform complicated information into simple information for users.

Figure 1 below shows the ACE! CJ-TRAK Knowledge Translation Tool Suite that users can access from the link: www.gmuace.org/tools. After registration with ACE!, both SOARING2 and the RNR Simulation Tool can be retrieved and used from this website. To get more specific information or receive answers to any questions, users can send an email to the ACE! research team at rnrtool@gmu.edu.

FIGURE 1. ACE! CJ-TRAK KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION TOOL SUITE



The Risk-Need-Responsivity Framework

Both SOARING2 and the RNR Simulation Tool use the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework. The updated version incorporates the original RNR framework developed by Andrews and Bonta (2010), along with revised analyses regarding how risk and dynamic need factors are related to outcomes in the justice system (Taxman and Pattavina, 2013). The updated RNR version emphasizes eight criminogenic needs or dynamic risk factors considered relevant to offending behaviors. These eight factors are: antisocial personality, antisocial cognitions, antisocial peers, criminal history, substance abuse, employment/education deficits, family dysfunction, and poor leisure time activities. Other noncriminogenic factors incorporated in the tool that augment risk factors include: mental illness, gender, age, housing stability, and food stability. These factors often affect how a person responds in situations and how they can comply with supervision conditions. Stabilizer factors (such as family support, having a job, etc.) support crime desistance and increase the likelihood of success in being crime free. Destabilizer factors (i.e., mental illness, lack of housing, and lack of education) make it difficult for individuals to focus and benefit from treatment programming and controls. By successfully identifying the stabilizers and destabilizers, justice actors and treatment providers can properly address the criminogenic needs and reduce risk factors. Both SOARING2 and the RNR Simulation Tool build on the RNR framework and assist officers and practitioners to successfully apply evidence-based practices to key decisions.

As an eLearning system, SOARING2 provides online training modules and resources, teaching frontline criminal justice personnel about best practices in their field, and provides them with the tools needed to apply these lessons to practical situations.

SOARING2

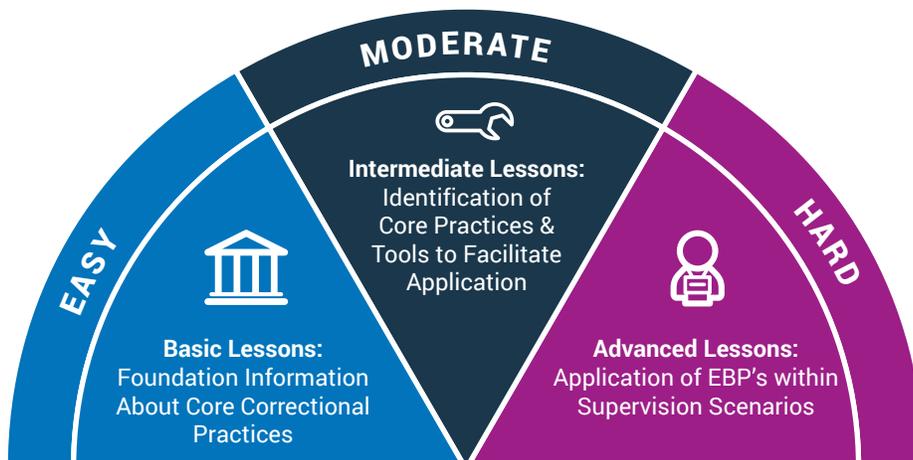
SOARING2 is an eLearning system assisting justice professionals in building skills associated with translating evidence-based research into practices to more effectively manage offenders. As an eLearning system, SOARING2 provides online training modules and resources, teaching frontline criminal justice personnel about best practices in their field, and provides job and tools needed to apply these lessons to practical situations.

Modules of SOARING2

The SOARING2 eLearning curriculum takes approximately 20 hours to complete and is completed at the user's pace within a recommended time period of 8 weeks. It currently includes five training modules: RNR Concepts, Case Planning, Problem Solving, Engagement, and Desistance. Each SOARING2 module has three levels of competence: basic, intermediate, and advanced lessons, as shown in figure 2. The basic lesson introduces users to core concepts defined by the research literature. The intermediate lesson uses cases, vignettes, and practice sessions to advance skill development. The advanced level challenges users to demonstrate their understanding of the research literature concepts by explaining the concepts to others.

The **RNR Concepts Module** focuses on taking stock of psychosocial factors common among criminal offenders. Officers learn to prioritize the most severe criminogenic needs that call for specific treatment, services, and controls. The **Case Planning Module** presents a common method for targeting criminogenic needs and working with the offenders to select and accomplish goals while involved in the justice system or treatment services. The **Problem Solving Module** focuses on the tools to help offenders recognize their own patterns that contribute to negative behavior(s) and identify alternative prosocial strategies to prevent reoffending. Included in this module are several tools, as well as case studies, that assist the staff in using the job aids and working on problem-solving activities with probationers. The **Engagement Module** emphasizes strategies to develop intrinsic motivation among offenders. This module focuses on communication and interaction skills to improve the working relationship with an offender. The **Desistance Module** presents recent research on how best to facilitate an early exit from a life of crime. Desistance is based on strength-building efforts to focus more attention on stabilizing the

FIGURE 2. SOARING2 COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT



person in the community through building social supports, reducing criminal lifestyles and criminal identities, and improving the ability to be self-sustaining.

Coaching: Building Officer Capacity to Address Needs

While training imparts knowledge, it does little to ensure that the skills are used in daily operations as part of routine practice. In fact, a fairly common issue related to training is that staff often have a difficult time translating material into practice. As part of SOARING2, coaches from the agency's office are trained to coach their staff. To ensure routine use of the new knowledge, coaches or internal staff use a structured rating form assessing officers' use of evidence-based practices and provide structured feedback to officers on their use of these practices. Post-training efforts assist staff in integrating newly learned knowledge and skills into their daily work.

The RNR Simulation Tool

The RNR Simulation Tool provides a toolkit to apply the RNR framework related to recidivism reduction to common decisions and practices. Agencies input information into the tool to customize the results to their own situations. The type of information that can be input into the tool varies and can include information about offenders, programs available to individuals involved in the justice system, and information from the justice system. The RNR Simulation Tool uses the specific information to help the user assimilate a range of information. The simulation tool uses the individual's jurisdictional information and has an underlying database of over 20,000 unique offender profiles of various risks, needs, stabilizers/destabilizers, and their associated recidivism rates.

The RNR Simulation Tool has three portals, one for each level: (1) program (the RNR Program Tool for Adults), (2) individual (Assess an Individual), and (3) jurisdiction, referring to the system, agency, or physical jurisdiction (Assess Jurisdiction's Capacity).

The RNR Program Tools for Adults

The RNR Program Tool is a 45-minute online program assessment examining the content, quality, dosage, and other features of available programming (i.e., services, treatments, or controls) for offenders. Jurisdiction administrators or program managers conduct an assessment by completing the online survey about a specific program offered in that jurisdiction. The survey requires information about six domains, including:

Risk: use of risk assessment tools to guide programming.

Needs: identification of key criminogenic needs.

Responsivity: identification of key factors that programs often use to tailor the programming to the individual such as gender responsiveness, age appropriateness, literacy, and cognitive appropriateness (treatment matching).

Implementation: implementation features, including staff, quality assurance, etc..

Dosage: dosage (intensity of program/service delivery).

Restrictiveness: degree of social controls and liberty restrictions used in the program.

The survey also includes validity checks ensuring consistency in the representation of information. Once the information is entered, the tool calculates a score in each area and provides a cumulative score for the program, reflecting the degree to which the program adopts evidence-based practices and management.

Possible scores for these six domains can range from 0 percent to 100 percent. In addition to the scoring rubric, the tool provides detailed feedback on the effectiveness of the program and, when applicable, identifies in each of the six domains the three enhancements that could be used to improve the quality of the program. The recommendations are based on the research literature for handling a particular criminogenic domain. Overall, this tool is intended to assist criminal justice and treatment agencies to better understand the resources available and increase the use of matching appropriate types of programming based on an individual's risk and needs assessment.

This **RNR Program Tool for Adults** classifies a program into one of six program groups, based on the main target behaviors that the program is designed to address. The classification scheme facilitates treatment matching by emphasizing the criminogenic needs that can be addressed through the program. The classification is designed to distinguish between programs that address different target behaviors and problem

FIGURE 3. SIX CLASSIFIED PROGRAMS



severity. The Assess an Individual (AAI) portal recognizes that more intensive programs will address more than one criminogenic need and other destabilizing factors. As shown in figure 3, the following are the primary target behaviors of each group of programs. Based on the research literature, programs included in categories A, B, and C have the most potential for reducing recidivism. The remaining three program categories assist individuals to become more stable in the community by enabling employment, teaching child rearing, and facilitating other civic roles.

As shown in Figure 3, there are six classified programs:

- 1) Severe Substance Dependence Disorder (Group A): Treatment focuses on cognitive restructuring techniques for substance dependence on opioids, cocaine, amphetamines, and other hard drugs. These programs target offenders who are dependent (addicted) on drugs that tend to lead to criminal behavior. Most of these programs are higher dosage and implemented with a curriculum.
- 2) Criminal Lifestyle and Cognition (Group B): Treatment focuses on promoting better prosocial decisions through cognitive restructuring techniques, including interpersonal and social skills development. These programs predominantly target high and moderate risk offenders, have a higher dosage of clinical hours, and are implemented with a curriculum.
- 3) Substance Abuse, Mental Illness, and Adjustment Disorders (Group C): Programs focus on developing self-improvement and management skills, including some cognitive restructuring work to help the individuals learn to self-manage their substance abuse (marijuana or alcohol abuse), mental health issues, or adjustment disorders. These programs predominantly target moderate and lower risk offenders with a few criminogenic needs.
- 4) Social and Interpersonal Skills (Group D): Programs focus on social skills and interpersonal skills, targeting multiple destabilizing issues. These programs target moderate to lower risk offenders with few criminogenic needs, and should have a lower dosage of clinical hours.
- 5) Life Skills (Group E): These programs focus on financial management, employability, housing stability, and other factors contributing to stability in the community. Programs in this group predominantly target lower risk individuals with one or no criminogenic needs.

6) No Programming (Group F): Individuals with no criminogenic needs and who are stable in the community are recommended to punishment-only programming. These punishment strategies can vary considerably and include community services, restorative justice, fines and other financial penalties, and other punishment-oriented programming.

Assess an Individual

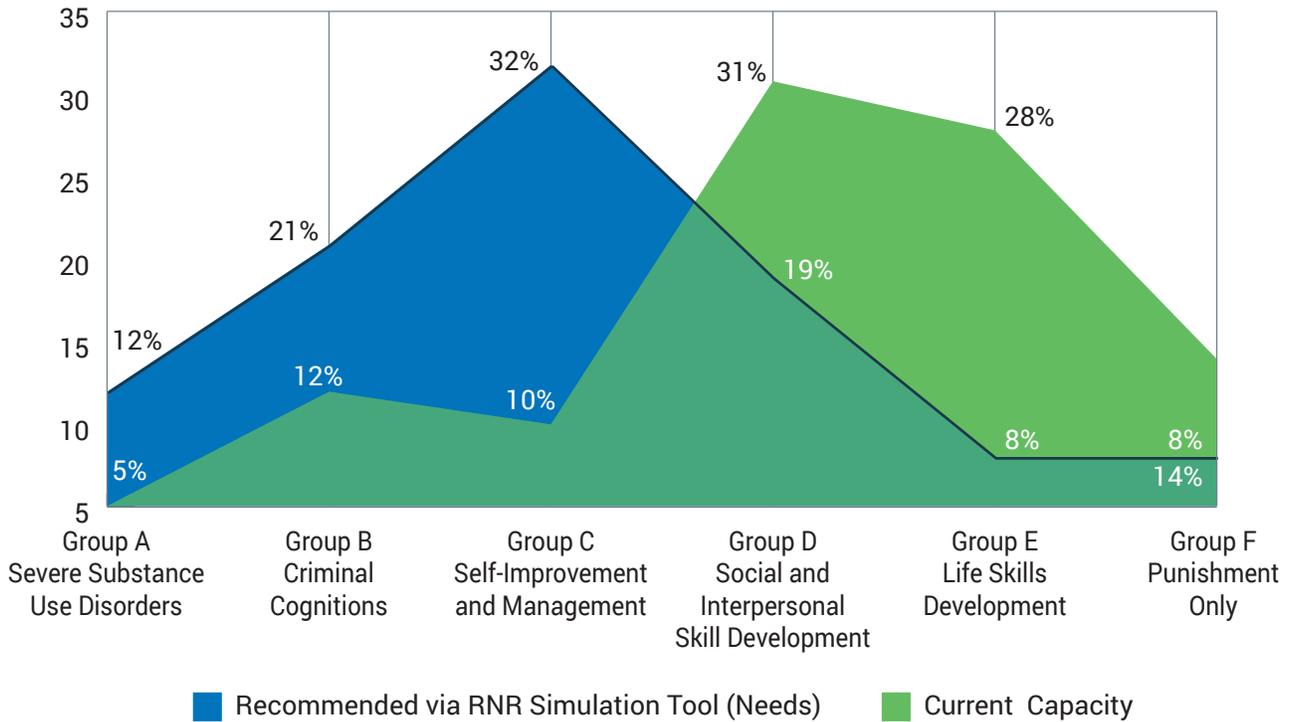
Designed to be used in screening, assessment, and referral functions, the Assess an Individual portal utilizes data from criminal justice and behavioral health screenings and assessments to determine the most effective type of program (and controls) to reduce individual recidivism. This matching procedure can be used with the risk-need instruments that a jurisdiction/agency uses, by itself (it has a built-in static risk instrument and tools to identify substance use disorder, mental health problems, and criminal thinking) or in combination with other tools. After an assessment is complete, the staff answer 17 questions that reflect on the individual's risk, needs, stabilizer and destabilizer factors, and lifestyle. After answering these questions, the RNR Simulation Tool recommends a type of program that would be most appropriate to address the risk and criminogenic need(s) of the assessed individual.

Using data from national surveys of inmates and/or probationers from various federal, state, and local jurisdictions, the underlying database contains 20,000 individual-level risks and needs profiles. The data identifies recidivism rates and then also determines the appropriate programming for the individual based on risk and need factors. Additionally, the reported information includes the estimated percent reduction in recidivism one might expect of the offender if they are matched to programming consistent with their unique needs.

Assess Jurisdiction's Capacity

The Assess Jurisdiction's Capacity portal aggregates information from the database on individuals in the justice system as well as programs available (using the RNR Program Tool described above). The information is presented to assess the degree of the risk and need characteristics of the offenders, which can be addressed by the types of programs available. It can be used at an agency, system, or jurisdictional level to learn about services. This portal identifies the system-level gaps in the programming offered in the jurisdiction. The Assess Jurisdiction's Capacity portal recommends levels of programming that are worth extending within the jurisdiction in order to better respond

FIGURE 4. GAP ANALYSIS FOR A HYPOTHETICAL JURISDICTION



to its population’s needs. As shown in figure 4, the area in blue represents the needs of the offenders in the system, whereas the area in green represents the programs available in the jurisdiction for these individuals. As shown here, there is a greater need for programming in categories A through C than available in the jurisdiction.

Hidalgo County Community Supervision and Corrections Department

The following case study describes the efforts by the Hidalgo County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD), with assistance provided by George Mason University, to pilot SOARING2 and utilize the RNR Simulation Tool to advance the implementation of evidence-based supervision in its probation agency.

Sitting in the Rio Grande Valley near the U.S.-Mexico border, CSCD provides supervision to more than 14,000 probationers in Hidalgo County and is the sixth largest probation agency in Texas. CSCD Chief Probation Officer Arnold Patrick applied to participate in the SOARING2 pilot to assist officers in better understanding the research literature and its application to supervision. Working with a small team of supervisors—Rodolfo

Perez, Faustino Lopez, and Jaime Torres—Hidalgo CSCD implemented SOARING2. The supervisors coached their staff after they achieved competency in learning the research literature. The Hidalgo County CSCD then implemented the RNR Simulation Tool decision support system in 2014, emphasizing the use of information gained from routine supervision activities such as assessment and case planning.

SOARING2 Training: The First Approach to Understanding and Addressing Needs

Evidence-based practices for community supervision involve the use of standardized risk and need assessment tools, focus on criminogenic needs (factors related to offending behavior), utilize case plans to facilitate attention to target behaviors, and use incentives (rather than sanctions) as rewards for achieving set goals (Taxman, 2008). However, a major challenge can be transferring the evidence-based approach to frontline officers and treatment providers. After experiencing this challenge, CSCD contacted ACE! to use the SOARING2 eLearning curriculum in an effort to train its officers on the use of evidence-based practices to reduce future offending behavior. The SOARING2 implementation process took place in three waves.

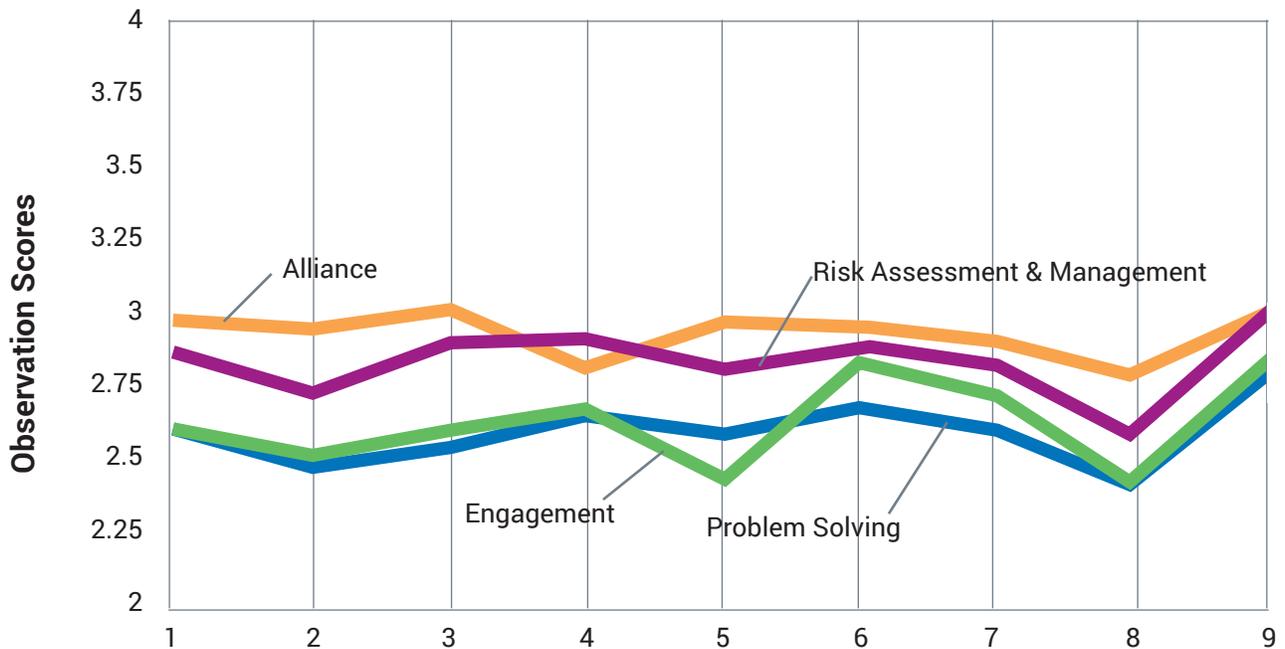
The first wave began in August 2012 for a pilot of 30 officers, and the second wave occurred in November 2013 for the remaining 120 officers. The eLearning component was supplemented by coaching that involved structured observations of the skills. The three supervisors—Rodolfo Perez, Faustino Lopez, and Jaime Torres—were trained as coaches and then coached their teams of officers. Coaching responsibilities included encouraging individuals to practice and use new skills in a supportive environment, adopting new skills through the use of observations and constructive feedback, providing onsite observations and feedback, and increasing the uptake of new skills.

Each month, a random sample of officers was selected and the coach conducted onsite observations. During the observation process, the coach: (1) observed an officer using skills with offenders; (2) provided feedback to the officer on how well they used the skills; (3) identified skill areas where the officer could improve; (4) modeled effective use of skills for officers; and (5) allowed the officer the ability to practice using new skills with immediate feedback from their supervisor-coach.

Impact of SOARING2 on Officers

The research team analyzed nine months of observational data and found that officers varied in their proficiency using evidence-based skills during supervision contacts. Officers' initial struggles to use these skills highlight their overemphasis on conditions of supervision. Typically in compliance-driver supervision, officers focus on these conditions

FIGURE 5. CHANGES IN OFFICERS' USE OF SKILLS OVER TIME



without giving enough attention to the offenders' criminogenic needs or dynamic risk factors. Observations are used to help officers use the skills. A baseline score of proficiency is given where 0 is "not proficient" and 4 is "uses the skills effectively." Then over the course of the observation period, officers demonstrated increased proficiency with risk assessment and management skills, indicating they had learned how to identify and prioritize criminogenic needs during the supervision process (figure 5). The officers displayed gains in all areas but particularly in using risk and needs assessments and problem solving.

Risk-Need-Responsivity Simulation Tool

The Hidalgo County CSCD implemented the RNR Simulation Tool in 2014 assisting officers to use the knowledge gained from routine supervision activity. CSCD initiated the process by delving into the RNR Program Tool for Adults and then working through the various portals.

Matching Probationers to Quality Programming

The Hidalgo County CSCD offers various programs treating probationers' needs in the community, and its staff, in conjunction with clinical staff, manage the majority of these programs. CSCD used the RNR Program Tool to examine the quality of ten of these programs, of which six are internally administered by CSCD and four are specialized courts

programs. The internal programs include: Thinking for a Change (T4C), Reduced Risk Program (RRP), Mentally Impaired Caseload (MI), Outpatient Drug Treatment Program, and Substance Abuse Treatment Facility (SATF). The four specialized courts programs are Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) Court, Drug Court, Veterans Treatment Court, and Veterans Family Treatment Court. The RNR Program Tool for Adults categorized these 10 programs by their primary target needs in the following program groups:

- Drug Court or Residential Treatment Programs as Group A (Severe Substance Use Disorders)
- Thinking for a Change (T4C) as Group B (Criminal Thinking)
- Aftercare, Mentally Impaired Caseload (MI), Outpatient Drug Treatment Program, Substance Abuse Treatment Facility (SATF), DWI Court, Veterans Treatment Court, and Veterans Family Treatment Court as Group C (Self-Improvement and Management)
- Reduced Risk Program (RRP) as Group F (Punishment only)

As described above, the RNR Program Tool provides a percentage score based upon the program's adherence to the following six essential features of effective programming, known as "domains": **risks, needs, responsivity, implementation, dosage,** and **restrictiveness**. CSCD programs averaged 58 percent adherence, with scores ranging from 40 percent (RRP) to 75 percent (SATF). The specialized courts earned a slightly higher average total score of 66 percent (range: 61 percent to 72 percent). Across all of the programs, **risk** and **restrictiveness** earned the highest average domain scores (87 percent and 81 percent, respectively), while **dosage** earned the lowest average score (34 percent), indicating a need for increased treatment hours/intensity. The RNR Program Tool also provided recommendations that would strengthen CSCD programs' existing services. The recommendation included making programming more targeted (e.g., on a single criminogenic need), using validated instruments to assess offender needs, using a treatment manual guiding processes, receiving technical assistance and/or coaching, and enlisting an external evaluator.

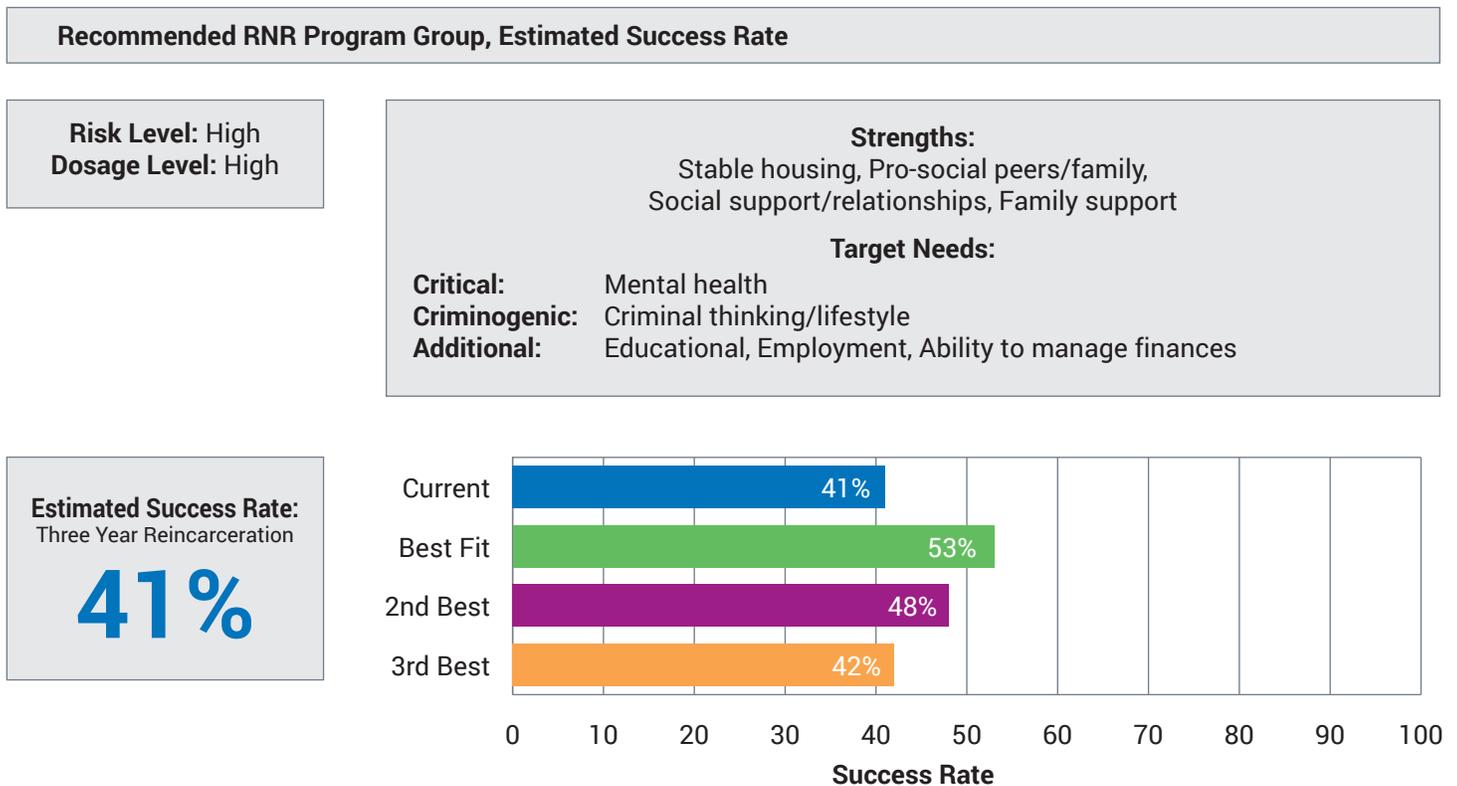
Case Planning With the Assess an Individual Portal

CSCD implemented the Assess an Individual (AAI) portal of the RNR Simulation Tool to assess probationer data to determine the most effective type of programming and controls to reduce recidivism for individual probationers. CSCD used the Wisconsin Risk and Need Assessment (WRNA) instrument as part of the AAI portal. The WRNA instrument guides parole and probation agencies in identifying a wide array of offender

needs. The WRNA tool was designed for classification purposes allowing supervision agencies to systematically assign offenders to different types of programming that address their need and risk factors (Taxman and Thanner, 2006). After a line staff person answers 17 questions about individual risk, needs, and lifestyle factors in the AAI portal, it incorporates an algorithm matching probationers to the appropriate treatment programming based on their risk and need factors. Underlying the AAI tool are placement criteria that link the risk level, type of criminogenic needs, and stabilizer factors to a level of programming for the individual.

The unique feature of the AAI tool is the individualized output that includes: (1) giving probationers an estimate of their likely rearrest rate during the period of supervision (this can be adjusted per jurisdiction, but CSCD uses a three-year rate); (2) identifying the major target dynamic needs of the probationer; (3) identifying the strengths that should be noted to facilitate desistance; (4) identifying the dosage level of programming to ensure that the individual is not placed in more or less intensive programs than needed; and (5) identifying the range of programming that will best reduce recidivism. Figure 6 is an example of individualized output which provided an offender’s estimated success rate, target needs, and strengths. The range of programming can be identified by name of the programs in that jurisdiction if the jurisdiction has completed the RNR Program Tool for Adults component.

FIGURE 6. ASSESS AN INDIVIDUAL OUTPUT (HYPOTHETICAL INDIVIDUALIZED REPORT)



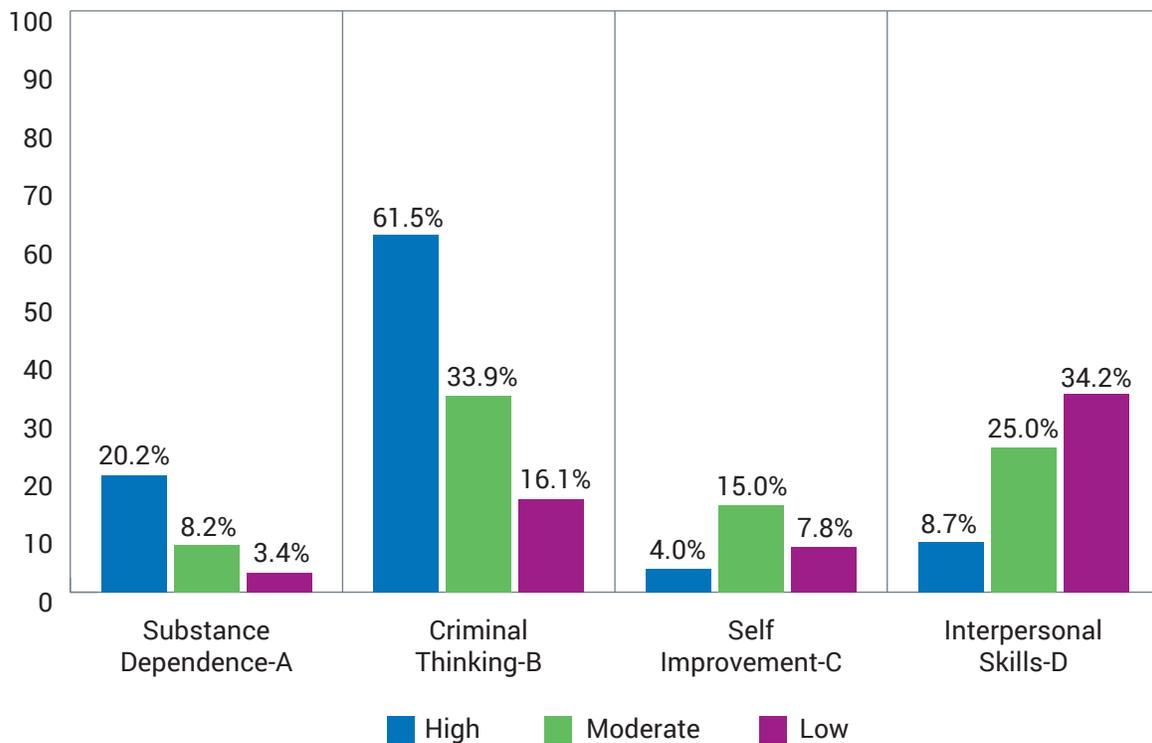
CSCD officers entered nearly 7,000 probationers into the AAI tool. The majority of probationers were moderate risk (55.4 percent), but 25.1 percent were high or very high risk, and 18.7 percent were low or very low risk. More than three-quarters were male (76.4 percent), and the vast majority were Hispanic or Latino (96.1 percent). The mean age was 32.1 years old. Figure 7 illustrates the needs of the population by risk level with various criminogenic needs; as shown here, the target behaviors are driven by the primary need, but destabilizer factors may facilitate a person to be recommended for a higher level of care to address these criminogenic needs.

Of those who were recommended to Substance Dependence (Group A) programming, approximately 44 percent were suitable for a high dosage which encompasses approximately 300 hours of treatment in a highly structured, long-term program targeting serious substance dependence. For programming targeting Criminal Thinking (Group B), 40 percent were recommended for high dosage and 35 percent for moderate dosage of programming.

Assessing Programming Needs With the Assess Jurisdiction’s Capacity Tool

The Assess Jurisdiction’s Capacity (AJC) tool uses an underlying database of unique offender profiles to assess a jurisdiction’s capacity to address the risk and need factors

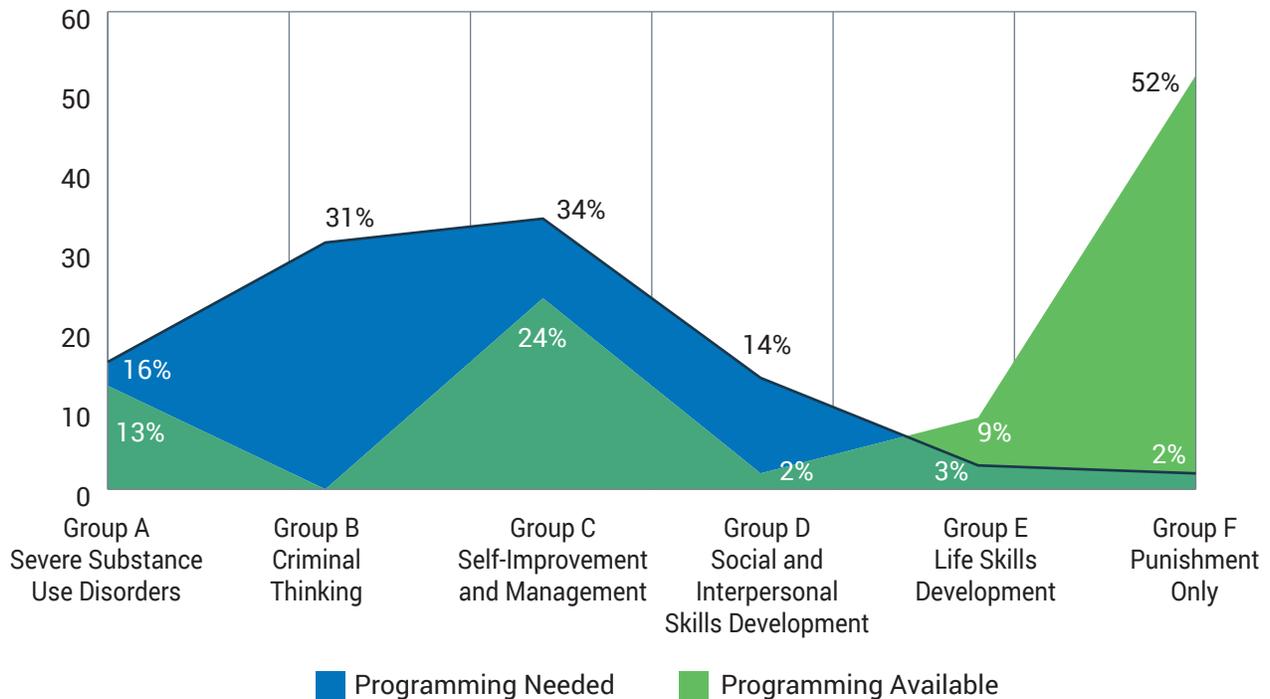
FIGURE 7. PROBATIONER RISK LEVEL ASSIGNED TO DIFFERENT PROGRAMS



of the individuals under its correctional control. It draws from information provided by the jurisdiction on profiles and/or programming to identify system-level gaps in the capacity to be responsive to the needs of its population. This portal is geared for administrators who wish to estimate the expected recidivism reduction when programming is matched to risk and needs at the jurisdictional level. The AJC tool provides recommendations by the same program groups used in the AAI and Program tools that assist jurisdiction administrators in identifying programming capacity requirements by type of dynamic need.

While Hidalgo County utilizes 10 programs to treat the various criminogenic needs of its probation population, there are gaps in the services available. To identify the system gaps, CSCD officers used probationer-level risk and need assessment data collected by the AAI tool and entered into the AJC tool. Using data from the programs entered into the RNR Program Tool for Adults, it was also possible to assess the match between the programming recommendations of the AJC tool and the actual capacity available to treat probationers in the programs currently offered by CSCD. Figure 8 displays the treatment gaps between the recommended capacity (in blue) and actual capacity available (in green). As the figure shows, the largest gap in treatment capacity is for Program Group B, which targets criminal thinking. While nearly 46 percent of the CSCD probationer population is in need of services to treat criminal thinking, at present, CSCD is only able to accommodate less than 1 percent in the Thinking for a Change (T4C) program it offers. Further responsiveness gaps are also present in each of the other programming groups with the exception of Group F, which includes punishment only. The system had an excessive

FIGURE 8. GAP BETWEEN PROGRAMMING NEEDED AND PROGRAMMING AVAILABLE



amount of programming that was control only, and needs programming in most other areas. This analysis indicates that given the relatively high needs of the probationers in Hidalgo County, additional programming is necessary to adequately treat the population, reduce criminogenic needs, and reduce recidivism.

Next Steps

The steps taken in Hidalgo County to improve the quality of the supervision process and treatment provided to the probationer population reflect a holistic approach. This includes building staff competence in using core correctional practices, increasing consistency and fidelity of practices across officers, improving program quality, improving matching of offenders to programs, and increasing service capacity at the system level. SOARING2 and the RNR Simulation Tool provide support for jurisdictions that goes beyond what is traditionally provided in staff trainings and focuses heavily on key challenges of the implementation process.

Through the CSCD–ACEI collaboration, CSCD implemented the use of evidence-based supervision practices in its jurisdiction. Officers are now equipped with knowledge about the research literature and better understand the importance of linking risk-need assessment information to items in the case plan. The agency also uses tools to help officers structure their use of the risk-need assessment to guide placement of the programming and to prioritize which probationers should receive the available programming.

Additionally, CSCD is now engaged in advancing its system-improving efforts to reduce recidivism. Like other counties in Texas, the Hidalgo County CSCD is implementing a new risk-needs assessment tool and intake procedures. All newly hired officers will be required to complete SOARING2 eLearning modules as part of the core training. Coaching will continue on a modified schedule, based on specific needs of the staff, but will continue frequently for officers who have difficulties applying the research-based literature. Informed by the research-based gap analysis conducted by ACEI, CSCD is also currently implementing recommendations to improve the quality of the 10 programs assessed by the RNR Program Tool. Specifically, the gap analysis indicated the need for programming to target severe substance use disorders and criminal thinking. CSCD is assessing how to best supplement existing programming to fill these gaps identified by the tool. The capability to assess the effectiveness of current programming and identify treatment needs specific to the Hidalgo County probationer population will drive future administrative and fiscal decisions to target the treatment needs of probationers under supervision in Hidalgo County, Texas.

About the Authors

Faye S. Taxman, Ph.D., is a university professor in the Criminology, Law and Society Department and director of the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence at George Mason University. She is recognized for her work in the development of systems-of-care models that link the criminal justice system with other service delivery systems as well as for her work in re-engineering probation and parole supervision services and in organizational change models.

Amy Murphy, M.P.P., is project director for the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence (ACE!) at George Mason University. She works with numerous corrections agencies and treatment providers to implement the RNR Simulation Tool.

Stephanie A. Maass, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of Criminal Justice in the School of Justice Studies and Sociology at Norwich University. Her research focuses on the adoption of evidence-based practices within community corrections agencies, the influence of individual- and agency-level factors in organizational change, and interventions for individuals with substance use and/or co-occurring disorders.

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**For a copy of the
full report, go to
www.gmuace.org.**

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"Hidalgo County Probation has benefited from SOARING2 and the RNR Simulation Tool. Our officers are more comfortable with using evidence-based practices, and we see improvements in their decisions. Our probationers are doing better on supervision and we are growing as an agency."

—Arnold Patrick, Director



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NCJ 251051