

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Incorporating Research into Practice

The Story of RIB's and Their Utility

The demands on probation and the courts are immense and the need for information on effective programming is critical. Districts often do not have the time to sift through research and consider how they might utilize the information and adjust practices to become more effective. In an effort to make research results more widely available and useful, *Colorado Probation Research in Briefs* (RIB) were developed. These monthly documents are intended to summarize potentially helpful information related to effective practices and suggest practical applications of the information. These hands-on tools can be easily integrated and make an impact on the effectiveness of supervision. Here are some the ways departments have put the information into practice:

- √ Probation Officers are using the Practical Applications to identify, practice, and incorporate new skills
- √ Supervisors are using RIB's to spur discussion in unit meetings and also use the content for improving probation officers' skills
- √ Chief Probation Officers review RIB's for implementation of evidence-based practices, which can lead to reduced recidivism, increased efficiency, and improved success.



Capturing effective research to improve probation practices.

What's in a RIB

A total of 18 RIB's have been distributed to the field between January 2006 and September 2008. Since August 2007, RIB's have been published monthly. The following is a list of the completed RIB's, with a brief summary of their content. All the documents below can be accessed at <http://www.courts.state.co.us/Administration/Division.cfm/Division/prob>.

Working Positively with Sexual Offenders (January 2006) Research indicates using a strength-based approach, in addition to considering criminogenic needs and risk, can improve the effectiveness of treatment programs for sexual offenders. Studies conclude treatment benefits (related to sexual offenders' attitudes, cognitive distortions, denial and other distortions etc.) were maximized when therapists were more empathic, warm, rewarding and directive rather than overly confrontational. Several ideas are proffered to assist the PO in improving their skills.

Absconder Project (April 2006) In 2003, PAC approved a pre/post absconder policy. As departments have struggled to implement this policy, the Absconder Project was initiated and a report written. This RIB summarizes the report and provides suggestions to reduce the probability of absconding.

Change-Focused Supervision (August 2007) This document discusses the results of a meta-analysis (a study of studies), which concluded: *therapy is effective*. The research shows effective therapies contain "four common factors" that are strength-based in nature. The four common factors that contribute to positive behavior change are: client factors, relationship factors, hope and expectancy, and model/technique. Practical applications provide ideas on enhancing these factors, in working with probationers.

Strength-Based Practices I (August 2007) In 1989 a "strengths perspective" was introduced. This RIB summarizes the approach's six principles labeled the ABC's: Accountability-Action, Believing-Brief, and Cooperation-Competency. This RIB kicks off a series of four on strength-based practices.

Strength-Based Practices II (August 2007) This RIB addresses the first and second principles of this approach: Accountability-Action. Practical applications provide guidance on asking effective questions to solicit strength-based action.

Strength-Based Practices III (August 2007) This RIB addresses the third and fourth principles of this approach: Believing-Brief. Suggestions are made to the reader for enhancing the self-efficacy of the probationer.

What's in a RIB? continued

Strength-Based Practices IV (August 2007) This RIB addresses the last two principles of this approach: Cooperation-Competency. The article encourages the reader to foster cooperation and suggests methods of questioning to uncover the probationer's strengths.

Communication Tools (September 2007) Based on one chapter, in a larger document of supervision tools, this RIB stresses the importance of communication style and office setting in creating a positive working alliance with the probationer. Practical applications include suggestions for improving the structure of appointments and ensuring a safe, as well as a friendly office environment.

What Works to Reduce Recidivism (November 2007) Examining an article written by Dr. Edward Latessa, this RIB focuses on principles proven to reduce recidivism. The reader is provided with ways in which to engage these principles in managing cases and offenders. Research applications include the use of quality assessments to identify the criminogenic needs/risk of the probationer and make appropriate referrals.

The Motivational Interviewing Style (December 2007) This RIB is the first of a series of four, based on a guide produced by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). This RIB covers the definition of motivational interviewing and provides a brief description of the basic concepts. The Practical Application section offers the reader ideas to express empathy, roll with resistance, and develop discrepancy, among others.

Preparing for Change (January 2008) This RIB is the second in the series of four, based on a guide produced by the NIC. The article discusses the probation officer's utilization of OARS: open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summarizations. The reader is provided with potential questions, which can be used in conversations with offenders to elicit behavior change.

Motivating Offenders to Change (March 2008) This RIB is the third to appear in a series of four, based on a guide produced by the NIC. It provides approaches to move an offender toward change, with strategies to guide conversations resulting in behavior change. The article has suggestions to encourage positive talk and get the probationer thinking about change. There are also suggestions on methods to connect talk to action.

Motivating Probationers to Change (April 2008) This RIB is the last in a series of four, based on a guide produced by the NIC. The article guides the reader through addressing deception, violations, and imposing sanctions with a motivational style. It is recommended that probation officers be up front with probationers; first by informing them of sanctions at the onset of supervision, and second, addressing violations immediately.

Incentives to Shape Offender Behavior (May 2008) Incentives have been proven to influence behavior change and this RIB explains their use. Practical examples are given for rewarding offenders, when they display the desired behavior change.

Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (June 2008) This RIB summarizes an NIC publication, which explored six cognitive behavioral programs evidenced to work in reducing recidivism among higher risk offenders. The RIB provides practical ideas for using cognitive-behavioral techniques during office visits with probationers.

Assessment and Case Planning (July 2008) Based on one chapter, in a larger document of supervision tools, the importance and nuances of developing a case plan is explored. The reader learns the basics of case planning, and recommendations are provided that enhance the effectiveness of case plans by improving offender behavior change.

Gender Responsiveness (August 2008) This article highlights the efforts of Cook County, Illinois in addressing the specific and unique needs of the female offender population. Practical applications include recognizing these unique needs and recommendations on possible referrals.

Social Networks (September 2008) For years, The Family Justice Institute has been a proponent of engaging family and social networks in supervision case plans. This RIB is based on their work out of New York, wherein the probation officer uses a variety of tools to identify, engage, and utilize the positive influences that naturally occur in the probationer's living environment. Practical examples are provided to assist the probation officer in exploiting these untapped resources.

"To improve probation & parole effectiveness and enhance safety of our communities, we must therefore adopt offender supervision practices that are supported by the existing evidence."
~ Thomas White,
Conn. Judicial Branch



Providing monthly research for application in the field.