

13TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT SERVICE UNIT

Final Report to the Richmond Juvenile & Domestic Relations District Court

Assessment Protocols for Juvenile Programs and Services

- **Evaluation of Currently Utilized Programs and Services**
- **Screening of Potential New Programs and Services**

Submitted by:

Program Assessment Protocol Team
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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING PROGRAM/SERVICE ASSESSMENT PROTOCOLS

SUMMARY OF WORK AND RECOMMENDED IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Introduction

The Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations (J&DR) District Court's 2005-2007 Strategic Plan sets forth the Court's long-term, strategic priorities. It outlines a strategic roadmap that will help the Court fulfill its mission, work toward its vision, and achieve its long-range goals.

Achieving effective outcomes is one of the Court's four main strategic issue areas. That is, the Court is committed to positively impacting youth, families, and the community it serves. To do so, it must continually evaluate the effectiveness of judicial decisions and actions and the services provided to youth and families.

One of the Court's first-year strategic priorities was to develop and implement a framework for assessing services provided to/programs for children and families involved with the court. Thus, at the Court's request, in January 2006, the 13th Judicial District Court Service Unit (CSU) formed an interdisciplinary team to develop an assessment tool for this purpose. The project's team members were invited to participate based upon their qualifications, expertise, and experience working in this field. Thus, the members included both researchers and practitioners knowledgeable about research, best practices, and issues in juvenile justice. When necessary, additional experts were consulted and/or invited to present.

This report summarizes the work of the project team. It presents the two assessment/evaluation protocols developed by the team – one to screen potential new programs and services and the other to evaluate existing programs and services. Finally, this report recommends an implementation approach – those tasks necessary to undertake in order to utilize the two assessment tools developed.

Background Information

Charge of the Team: The charge of the team was to work together between January and December 2006 to establish and implement a protocol for continually assessing/evaluating the outcomes achieved from all juvenile programs and services (GILS and non-GILS). (Note, the acronym GILS refers to the City's Graduated Intervention Levels System and is explained below.) As work progressed, the team realized the development of two protocols was necessary. Further, due to the extent of human and financial resources required to use the tools ultimately designed, the project team realized that full implementation during this time period was not feasible. Thus, a plan for implementation is included.

Problem and Goal Statements: Developed by the project team members, below are a statement of the problem and a goal statement that guided this work.

Problem Statement: The Richmond J&DR District Court, CSU, and the Richmond Department of Justice Services (RDJS) lack a consistent way to evaluate the effectiveness of existing and potentially new programs/services (GILS and others).

Goal Statement: To develop and implement an evaluation protocol (practices, forms, mindset) that assesses/addresses the entire continuum of programs and services including referral, program activities, and outcomes.

Criteria for Developing the Protocol: The team identified the following criteria for the protocol:

1. Anchored in evidence-based practices and current research;
2. Objective evaluation (not subjective) – quantitative/qualitative data;
3. Simple, practical – easy to use/realistic; and
4. Specific to local demographics/population (gender, ethnicity, age, culture, education, etc.).

Overview of the Process: Early in 2006, the team met several times to learn about existing programs and services (GILS and non-GILS programs) and review evidence-based practices and current research. During the first six months of the year, the project team, comprised of staff from the CSU, RDJS, and experts from the juvenile and criminal justice fields, met to gather information to assist in the creation of the development of a program assessment protocol tool. First, the experts educated the team about evidence-based practices and the application of evidenced-based principles to juvenile offender programming. In addition, the experts on the team presented established program evaluation models that frequently are used to determine the effectiveness of juvenile justice programs.

Second, RDJS and the CSU reviewed existing juvenile justice programs currently being offered to juveniles that either informally become involved with the CSU or formally appear before the Court and are monitored and/or supervised by the CSU. The majority of the programs are administered by RDJS via the Graduated Interventions Level System (GILS), a system based on the principles of the balanced approach and the restorative justice model. Juveniles enter the system via the CSU with a range of offenses. Then, based on assessment, the juvenile is placed into programs/services that are primarily offered by RDJS; however, the CSU also has a small number of programs administered by private providers.

Third, the CSU educated the project team on how it uses several instruments to determine a juvenile's risk level, including the GILS needs assessment tool to determine a juvenile's service level need. Lastly, the project team heard from an expert from the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice on local juvenile social trends (economics, education, family demographics, health, protective factors, and crime) in comparison to state juvenile social trends.

After discussing and agreeing on a general framework and criteria, the team formed a smaller work group to develop two protocols: one for evaluating existing programs/services and the other for screening potential new programs/services. As part of their work, the team agreed it's

final product also should include an implementation plan to accompany these two tools, presented later in this final report.

Members of the small work group met frequently over the summer months to discuss and to draft the content and format for the assessment and evaluation tools. In late summer/early fall 2006, the entire team reconvened to review and refine the protocols drafted by the small work group and to develop an implementation approach.

Assessment Protocols

As noted above, the team developed two assessment tools: one to evaluate programs and services in place currently and the other to screen and assess the viability of potential new programs and services. Both assessment tools are attached to this final report.

The tools were developed to assess correctional intervention programs and will be used to ascertain how closely juvenile court programs meet known principals of effective interventions which are known to reduce offender recidivism.

Until recently, both adult and juvenile community corrections have lacked research that identified proven methods of reducing offender recidivism. Recent research efforts based on meta-analysis (the syntheses of data from many research studies), cost benefit analysis, and specific clinical trials have broken through this barrier and now provide the field with indications of how to better reduce recidivism. This research indicates that certain programs and intervention strategies, when applied to a variety of offender populations, reliably produce sustained reduction in recidivism. Evidence-based practice (EBP) is a significant trend throughout all human service fields that emphasizes outcomes. Interventions within corrections are considered effective when they reduce offender risk and subsequent recidivism and therefore make a positive long-term contribution to public safety.

Effective program interventions are guided by eight evidenced-based principles. The eight principals are interdependent and each is supported by existing research. The principals are:

1. assess actuarial risk/needs;
2. enhance intrinsic motivation;
3. target interventions;
4. skill train with direct practice;
5. increase positive reinforcement;
6. engage ongoing support in natural communities;
7. measure relevant processes/practices; and
8. provide measurement feedback.

EBP pays strict attention to the research and carefully introduces those programs or interventions supported by the best research evidence. Such research has resulted in the promotion of research-supported program models. The adoption of research-supported program models fosters outcome-based programming and provides blueprints for replication.

In consideration of the above-referenced information, the work group used components of existing program assessment tools to develop the two protocols being recommended for implementation and ongoing use by the CSU and RDJS.

The first protocol was developed for the assessment of potential new programs and services. These assessments will be conducted by staff trained in the measurement of EBP who are employed by the CSU and RDJS. The tool was designed to assess:

1. program overview and identified juvenile offender needs;
2. program qualifications;
3. application of EBP to measure program effectiveness;
4. program outcomes;
5. quality assurance;
6. staff qualifications; and
7. cost effectiveness.

The second protocol was developed for the evaluation of existing programs and services, primarily offered by RDJS and private providers. Ideally, evaluations will be conducted by qualified independent evaluators. The tool was designed to assess:

1. needs assessment;
2. outcomes;
3. cost effectiveness;
4. leadership and development;
5. staff characteristics;
6. quality assurance;
7. offender assessment; and
8. treatment characteristics.

(Note, much of the information in this section is reprinted from the article “Implementing Evidence-Based Practice in Community Corrections: The Principles of Effective Intervention,” April 30, 2004; copy attached.)

Recommended Implementation / Roll-Out Approach

As noted above, the team accomplished its goal: it developed two protocols, one of which will serve as a tool to screen new programs/services and the other that will guide the evaluation of existing programs/services. This final product includes recommendations for implementing the protocols, which will be passed on to a smaller implementation team(s) and/or individuals as appropriate to finalize and to follow-through on, under the direction of the CSU and in partnership with RDJS.

The implementation recommendations are organized into the following broad categories. Consult the attached action plan (a separate document) for the detailed steps included in each area.

1. Communication. The project team wishes to acknowledge this significant accomplishment and recognizes there are many stakeholders that need to be

thoroughly educated about this new approach. Thus, this category includes such tasks as (a) announcing the development of the protocols/assessment tools (e.g., via a press release), (b) meeting with judges to present/review protocols and implementation approach, (c) preparing orientation packets for vendors, (d) planning and conducting a kick-off meeting for CSU and RDJS staff and other important partners to inform them of the tools, and (e) putting information on the Court and City's websites, etc.

2. Training. The project team wishes to ensure all stakeholders are appropriately trained based on their role in the utilization of these tools. Thus, this category reflects (a) conducting an extensive orientation/overview to appropriate CSU, RDJS, and other partner staff (in greater detail than the kick-off meeting), and (b) training the screeners on evidence-based practices, using the tools, and the like.
3. Automating the Screening Protocol for Potential New Programs and Services. The project team believes that successful implementation of this tool requires development of an automated system for use by the screeners. This includes (a) selecting a vendor to develop an automated tool, possibly an Access database, and securing funding if necessary, (b) working with vendor to ensure final product reflects intent of the project team, and (c) providing shared, web-access for the screeners, etc.
4. Developing Approach and Resources for Evaluating Existing Programs. Given the number of existing programs and services to be evaluated, along with the requirements of the protocol to guide what must be included in evaluations, the project team acknowledges a considerable range of options must be considered in order to implement use of this tool. This major category includes (a) exploring options for resources (i.e., funding and staffing), (b) determining the order in which existing programs and services will be evaluated, (c) determining the desired minimum qualifications of evaluators, and (d) establishing a feasible schedule for the pace of conducting evaluations.
5. Develop Process and Procedures for Using Protocols. The project team believes use of the two protocols will require a well-defined process and clear procedures to ensure consistent application over the long-term. This includes such tasks as (a) constituting a standing review team, (b) developing review guidelines and other practices for reviewing and disseminating results, (c) developing policies and procedures, (d) identifying two additional, trained "back-up" screeners, (e) determining how to update the Court and other partners as needed on evaluation results, (f) methods for communicating decisions to vendors, (g) reviewing the evaluation at six- and twelve-month intervals (or as needed), and (h) making systematic improvements as needed.

Attachments

1. Protocol for the Evaluation of Juvenile Programs and Services
2. Protocol for the Screening of Potential New Juvenile Programs and Services
3. Project Implementation Plan
4. Implementing Evidence-Based Practice in Community Corrections: The Principles of Effective Intervention