

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Do We Care What Offenders Think?

Source Document: Cherkos, R., Ferguson, J., & Cook, A. (2008). Do We Care What Offenders Think? *Perspectives*, 32(3), 53-58.

Key Words: EBP, client satisfaction, survey, accountability, probationer perceptions, implementation

Summary/Conclusions

The source article describes the efforts of Maricopa County Adult Probation (MCAP) to obtain probationers' opinions on the services provided by the agency. MCAP has been implementing evidence-based practices since 2004 and was interested to see if their efforts to improve "supervision strategies were reaching the primary recipients, the probationers." MCAP's Planning and Research Unit developed a survey and administered it during one-day site visits. The results were surprising, reflecting a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by MCAP. The results were shared with probation officers, as well as stakeholders, to emphasize the good work that is occurring in probation.

Limitations of Information

Of all the probationers approached to complete the survey, 82% provided responses; however, the authors did not address why 18% of those approached did not participate. Without this information, it is difficult to determine the motivation of those who did complete the survey and whether they were more satisfied with MCAP services than non-respondents. Also, the population studied was comprised of adults, which limits its comparability to Colorado probation overall.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Probationer Surveys

The Maricopa County government mandates that county services report customer satisfaction results. As part of Maricopa County Adult Probation's effort to comply with county regulations and to determine if their four-year old efforts to implement evidence-based practices (EBP), their Planning and Research Unit developed a customer satisfaction survey. The survey, conducted in 2007, would be used as a baseline for future surveys, as well as "positive reinforcement to our employees who are doing a good job and to our stakeholders to promote confidence." Moreover, when probationers are satisfied, they "are more likely to comply with treatment requests and the directives of their probation officers."

Maricopa County Adult Probation (MCAP) supervises an average of 31,380 probationers at 14 different office locations. Over one day, researchers visited eight of the largest offices and asked 569 probationers to respond to a 14-item survey, which was anonymous and confidential. A total of 468 probationers completed the survey, and the respondents' demographics "were similar to the demographics for the overall population."

Although some in the field were apprehensive about asking the probationers' opinions, the results showed that 86% of all respondents were satisfied with probation services. Specifically, "nine out of ten respondents agreed that the probation officer spends a reasonable amount of time with them, treats them respectfully, lets them know how they are doing, listens to them and works together with them to help them complete probation. The biggest area of dissatisfaction was the waiting time in the lobby."

The MCAP also found that EBP initiatives, such as addressing criminogenic needs and using case plans, were taking hold in office visits. Comments from probationers reflected these items were main topics in meetings with probation.

Practical Applications

- √ Ensure all staff has viewed and completed the EBP Probation Orientation video and training.
- √ Practice motivational interviewing skills then have a supervisor or peer observe appointments and provide feedback.
- √ Utilize case plans, with clear goals and action steps, to direct each appointment. Also use frequent positive reinforcement for accomplishments.
- √ Record voice mail messages regularly to update when you are available and who to contact in your absence.
- √ Check-in regularly with probationers, asking if they understood or if they are getting enough time with PO.
- √ Make a suggestion box available for probationers to give their ideas, then form a committee to regularly review and address the comments.
- √ Train front desk staff in the importance of maintaining a positive working relationship with the probationers, so a client's first contact is favorable.
- √ Brainstorm ideas to minimize the wait time, which probationers may experience in the lobby.
- √ The staff of DPS will be conducting a client survey in your district. Use the results to build on strengths and troubleshoot problem areas.

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303.861.1111; www.courts.state.co.us **March 2009**