

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Reinforcing compliance with non-drug-related activities*

Petry, N., Tedford, J., et al. (2001). "Reinforcing compliance with non-drug-related activities." Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment 20: 33-44.

**Key Words:** Substance abuse, contingency management, incentives, treatment

### Summary/Conclusions

Encouraging, setting, and reinforcing goals in a criminal justice setting can be a complex process. In a study from 2001, researchers examined the effect of providing incentives for achieving-client-centered activities/goals in an intensive outpatient program (IOP). Participants from two IOP facilities were assigned to either standard treatment or an experimental group where they received incentives for providing negative substance abuse testing results and completing self-selected goals. Individuals in the group who were provided incentives stayed in treatment longer than the control group and finished 66% of activities/goals they selected.

### Limitations of Information

The study contained a small population from two IOP treatment facilities. Colorado's probation population may differ from those contained in the study. It is unclear if the "Leisure Checklist" primed participants to focus on goals related to leisure/recreation. The activity/goal planning was performed by a research assistant and not a person in an authoritative role. The study lacks any sobriety results for clients in the experimental group.

**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.

### Using Incentives with Case Plans

Previous research has identified that incentives are effective in treating substance abuse, particularly in opioid, nicotine, marijuana, and benzodiazepine dependent individuals. Prior studies also suggest that incentivizing treatment goals can have a more positive effect on sobriety than treatment alone. Researchers believe the treatment goals pull individuals away from the driving factors of substance abuse. This study examined the effect of incentives for clean drug tests and the completion of activities set collaboratively with a research assistant for 46 individuals in an IOP.

Clients in the study were placed in standard IOP treatment programming. After receiving treatment the clients in the experimental group would submit substance use tests, review completion of set activities, and set new activities. Participants could set up to five activities per week. Activities fell into one of ten categories. The categories of activities were education, employment, family, health, housing, legal, personal improvement, sobriety, social/recreation, and transportation. Incentive slips were provided for clean substance tests and completed activities. The slips of paper either said "Sorry, try again" or contained incentives from \$1 and \$20 amounts. The bowl also contained one \$100 grand prize.

The study revealed that the participants who received incentives for activities and clean drug tests stayed in treatment

longer than the group who did not receive incentives. Two-thirds (66%) of the 1,059 activities/goals identified were completed. Goals were set by the clients with some feedback from a research assistant.

### Practical Applications

- ✓ Provide assessment information to probationers to facilitate a conversation about possible case plan goals related to criminogenic needs.
- ✓ Consider delivering incentives for the completion of established case plan action steps and goals.
- ✓ Collaborate with the probationer to establish case plan goals.
- ✓ Create case plans that are in the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) format.
- ✓ Try using the optional case plan formats located at Judicialnet> Case Plan>Case Plan Format.
- ✓ For case plans, quality assurance (QA) and continuous quality improvement (CQI) tools have been created. Use the QA and CQI tools on your case plans to determine your own strengths and areas of improvement. The QA/CQI tools are located at Judicialnet>QA/CQI> Case Planning.
- ✓ Ask your supervisor for feedback on your case plans, possibly utilizing the case plan QA/CQI tools.
- ✓ When trained, use the Strategies for Behavior Change (SBC) program to deliver incentives.