

Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)

the Green sheet

Changing the Face of Offender Contacts

Today, Sept. 11, the Board kicked off a new training program for state parole agents, county probation officers and community corrections personnel that will better help them identify criminal thinking and behaviors of high risk offenders.

“On the anniversary of the terrorist attacks upon our country 14 years ago, this day serves to remind us how important public safety is in our democracy,” said Acting Chairman of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole John R. Tuttle. “In my mind it underscores the necessity of what we are celebrating today – effective public safety.”

A Recognition and Statewide Implementation Ceremony of Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) was held today for the 120 state parole agents, county probation officers, and Department of Corrections Bureau of Community Corrections personnel who participated in the training.

Research demonstrates that offenders under the supervision of EPICS-trained staff reoffend at markedly lower rates than offenders supervised by non-trained staff.

Parole officers enforce conditions of parole, make referrals for treatment, and problem-solve with offenders. EPICS provides the skills for agents to apply core correctional practices directly to the face-to-face contact with an offender.

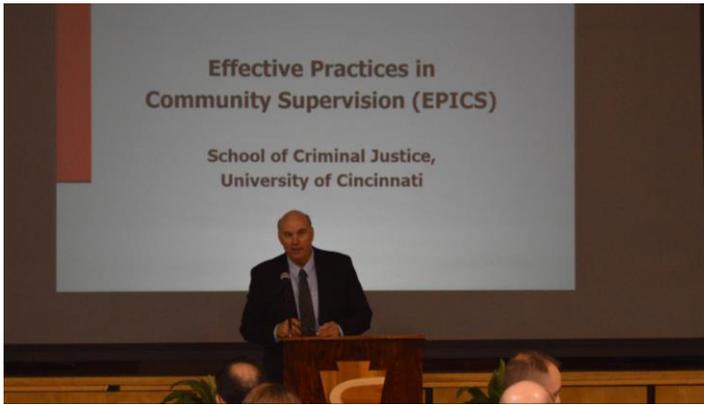
“I have more than 37 years in this field. Over this time we’ve seen a lot of programs and strategies come and go, but I’ve never seen, nor do I think anyone else has seen, anything that gives us more promise to make us as effective as we possibly can be to reduce recidivism and promote public safety,” said Tuttle.

EPICS was developed under the leadership and expertise of the esteemed Dr. Edward Latessa of the University of Cincinnati School of Criminal Justice.

“The most current research is suggesting that the relationship with the officer and what is discussed is important,” states Dr. Latessa. Further, he states the “[s]trongest theory of human behavior is social learning, so...[it is] important to use structured social learning and CBT [cognitive behavioral therapy] in one-on-one interactions with offenders.”



*Jason Stauffer,
Division Director
in the Bureau of
Offender Reentry
Coordination and
EPICS project
manager
welcomed the
attendees.*



Acting Chairman John Tuttle emphasized the importance of EPICS to improve public safety through changed offender behavior.

Probation, parole and corrections have been focused on putting structures in place to be evidence-based agencies. At the Board, field agents and other supervision staff have been trained and retrained in evidence-based practices for many years in order to learn how to change offender behavior. These principles have been incorporated into many of the Board’s supervision practices.

“EPICS represents the next phase toward full implementation of evidence-based practices to facilitate positive behavioral change by focusing on a typical offender supervision contact,” said Tuttle.

As part of the pilot project, some officers and agents were trained to be EPICS facilitators within their own agency.

Evidence-based practices certainly are not new, but making supervision contacts evidence-based is a fairly recent development. Therefore, the Board is planning an evaluation of EPICS, providing an important contribution to the literature on what works with offenders.

Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel thanked the participants for the impact they make on the lives of people every day.



Mark Wilson, Chief of Lancaster County Adult Probation and Parole Services, expressed the county chief’s support for EPICS.



What is EPICS?

With the EPICS model, staff follow a structured approach to their interactions with their offenders. Specifically, each contact session includes four components.

One

Check-In, in which the officer determines if the offender has any crises or acute needs, builds rapport and discusses compliance issues.

Two

Review, which focuses on the skills discussed in the prior session, the application of those skills, and troubleshooting continued problems in the use of those skills.

Three

Intervention, where the officer identifies continued areas of need, trends in problems the offender’s experiences, teaches relevant skills, and targets problematic thinking.

Four

Homework and Rehearsal is when the offender is given an opportunity to practice the new skill with a homework assignment and is given instructions to follow before the next visit.



Dan McIntyre, Deputy Executive Director of the Office of Field Probation and Parole Supervision, left the attendees with final remarks about embracing change.