BULLETIN

The RESEARCH BULLETIN is a publication of the Statistical Reporting and Evidence-Based Program Evaluation Office. The office is responsible for the continuing research and data activities of the Board of Probation and Parole.

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Welcome! This is the first issue of the *RESEARCH BULLETIN*, a publication of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole's (PBPP) Statistical Reporting and Evidence-Based Program Evaluation Office. This office is responsible for the continuing research and data activities of the board, including planning and coordination of board research initiatives, preparation of research methodologies, instrumentation design and development, data extraction and analysis, performance metrics, providing information and recommendations to board members and senior staff, and responding to ad-hoc requests on a wide variety of agency topics.

It is our hope that this information will be utilized by individuals currently working in the fields of probation and parole, as well as practitioners, academics, and students. In this premier issue, you will find information pertaining to specialized agent caseloads, Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), PBPP's Reentry Program, Transitional Housing Units (THU), as well as recent presentations conducted by research staff.

EPICS: Effective Practices in Community Supervision

Recently, the PBPP began implementation of the "Effective Practices in Community Supervision" (EPICS) model. Developed by the University of Cincinnati and based on over three decades of correctional research, EPICS combines the principles of effective intervention with core correctional practices, helping to reduce recidivism and victimization in the community. Overall, empirical research has shown the guidance and standards provided by EPICS are linked to more successful outcomes for those under community supervision.

As part of this paradigm shift in PBPP's approach to community supervision, board researchers designed a survey to assess staff perspectives regarding supervision practices and strategies that influence offender behavior. Specifically, parole agents and parole supervisors were given the opportunity to express views and comments regarding these topics.

The majority of survey respondents agreed that promotion of prosocial behavior, rapport building, and knowing each parolee's situation are important elements of their job. Survey respondents also indicated that they treat parolees fairly, utilize a nonjudgmental approach, demonstrate prosocial skills to parolees on their caseload, and can identify a parolee's criminogenic needs.

Nearly 75% of the survey respondents believe supervision should be balanced between social work and law enforcement. It is worth mentioning that 70% of survey respondents expressed concern regarding workload demands. The board continues to make progressive changes and has aimed to hire additional parole agents over the next year.

Board researchers intend to continue this evaluation in the future and share the results with the field. Additional analysis, future surveys, and outcome evaluations are planned to measure changes in staff perspectives and the overall impact of EPICS on parolee outcomes.

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Specialized Caseloads

In recent years, specialized agent caseloads have gained much attention. Last year's PBPP recidivism report included an initial analysis of cases supervised primarily by a mental health (MH) agent. At that time, researchers found a nearly 10 percentage point reduction in recidivism for those individuals who were assigned to a MH agent when compared to a non-MH agent. While this initial analysis is encouraging, it is important to understand that this conclusion was based on a small sample size and further research would be prudent.

Some empirical evidence suggests that specialized caseloads are effective in reducing risk, connecting individuals to appropriate treatment services, and improving quality of life (Skeem and Loudon, 2006). Researchers Hamblin and Rhyne (2010) reported that probation and parole officers who receive continuous training and information regarding their specialized caseloads can assist in their understanding of the unique risks and needs of these individuals.

In hopes of further improving supervision outcomes, researchers have been assisting the field and PBPP's Bureau of Offender Reentry Coordination in order to develop better procedures and training for MH agents. In August 2016, a new procedure was implemented for MH agents dealing with case assignments, including a revised caseload capacity of 40 parolees, as well as setting additional supervision and training requirements for those agents carrying a MH caseload.
Although it's premature to make a determination on the overall effectiveness of specialized agent caseloads, the board continues to evaluate the benefits of this supervision approach.

Skeem, J.L. and Eno-Louden, J. (2006). Toward evidence-based practice for probationers and parolees mandated to mental health treatment. *Psychiatric Services, 57* (3): 333-342.

Hamblin, L. and Rhyne, C. (2010, June). *What makes a specialized caseload special?* Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, Quality Systems and Evaluation Services Unit. Retrieved from https://multco.us.file/27861/download

Reentry Program Evaluation

From February 2013 to August 2014, the Statistical Reporting and Evidence-Based Program Evaluation Office [SREBPEO] conducted a total of 261 self-report surveys and 226 face-to-face interviews with parolees placed in the York, Lackawanna, Berks, and Dauphin County Reentry Programs.

Qualitative information gathering also included observation of monthly reentry program sessions held in the courtroom and pre-meetings, as well as interviewing and surveying staff members of each respective reentry team.

Findings from the evaluation illustrate the program's effectiveness in the short-term, with decreased success over time. In response to these results, the board has implemented the following improvements in an effort to in improve long-term outcomes:

- ✓ Increased oversight of reentry program staff duties and responsibilities.
- ✓ Elimination of sanctioning offenders into the program.

Transitional Housing Units (THU)

In response to the ongoing need for reentry services dedicated to offenders returning home to their communities, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) established Transitional Housing Units (THUs) and Reentry Services Offices (RSOs) at selected state correctional institutions (SCIs) across the commonwealth.

Recognizing that most THU and RSO participants will be under parole supervision once released from an SCI, PBPP researchers conducted a six-month process evaluation of each THU and RSO. This process evaluation served as an initial report analyzing the early development and implementation of the THU/RSO concept, providing in-depth information regarding THU and RSO operations, implementation, and service delivery.

A total of 357 self-report surveys were completed by active THU or RSO participants; a staff survey was also created and completed online by 35 PBPP and DOC staff members currently involved with the THU or RSO at their respective site(s). In addition to the surveys, 33 face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researchers with THU and RSO staff. During the site visits, the researchers also facilitated one-hour focus group discussions with selected THU or RSO participants, expanding on the information requested in the surveys and adding additional perspectives and information from participants.

Based on the data and observations gathered over the course of this process evaluation, the following recommendations were conveyed by the researchers regarding the THUs and RSOs:

- Provide resources to give resources: adequate staffing and programming is needed.
- Increased support and direction from DOC administration.
- Flexibility to operate the THU/RSO as intended.
- Placement of the right staff in the right positions.
- Consideration of the correct type of THU/RSO participant.
- Implementation of computer resources beyond Resume Builder.

Overall, certain aspects of the THUs and RSOs have provided parolees with some of the resources needed for successful community reintegration. However, difficulties and challenges remain, and further improvements are recommended. In the future, the researchers plan to conduct an outcomes evaluation, assessing the long-term effectiveness of the THU/RSO concept.

Reentry Program Evaluation (continued)

- ✓ Revised urinalysis requirements, progress reporting, graduation eligibility, and standardization of the number of parolee contacts from reentry agents.
- ✓ Reentry agents shall maintain supervision of graduates on their caseload for at least one-year following program completion.
- ✓ Graduates who express interest may be referred to a reentry program alumni group.

In collaboration with Dr. Michael Antonio, Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at West Chester University, several board researchers have submitted the results of their findings to the academic, peer-reviewed *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*.

The article was accepted and published online on July 6, 2016 on the journal's website, while printed copies will be available in early 2017.

Sharing Knowledge

In May 2016, PBPP researchers were busy not only in the office, but in the field presenting information on a variety of topics, including qualitative data, recidivism, and mental health. These presentations included:

- *"Utilizing Data to Assist in Organizational Change,"* presented by Michele Hiester at the annual Penn State Data User Conference in Middletown, Pennsylvania.
- *"Building and Using a Dataset to Produce Varied Recidivism and Failure Measures,"* presented by Tom Powers at the fifth annual ICRN-NCRP Data Providers Meeting in Aurora, Colorado.
- *"Confronting the Challenges of Mental Health: A Parole Approach,"* presented by Jesse S. Zortman at the PAPPC 95th Annual Training Institute and Conference in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Encouragingly, all three presentations were well-received at their respective locations and provided audiences with valuable information regarding current PBPP research topics. In the future, researchers hope to continue sharing results of their projects at both local and national events, including the 2017 American Society of Criminology (ASC) annual meeting in Philadelphia.

Specialized Training: DSM-5

On September 20, 2016, 48 mental health (MH) agents, supervisors, and directors participated in specialized training at central office. In response to the ongoing need for mental health information and knowledge in the field, this training session provided a broad overview of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- Fifth Edition (DSM-5). Published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the DSM-5 manual offers detailed symptomology and diagnostic criteria for professionals working with mentally ill individuals.

Conducted by board employee Jesse Zortman MA, MACP, the five-hour training provided parole staff with a historical overview of the manual, major changes between editions, diagnosis interpretation, cultural considerations, case examples, and other mental health information relevant to those working in probation and parole. Feedback received from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, prompting discussions for future trainings related to specific mood and personality disorders, psychotropic medications, and techniques for working with parolees with mental illness.

Questions, Comments, and Correspondence

One of the primary goals of the *Research Bulletin* is to establish awareness and increase transparency of the activities conducted by the board's research staff. We welcome your feedback, questions, comments, and concerns.

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