

Summary of the Program

The Competency Building Program (also known as: “the Corrective Thinking Program”) is a community-based outpatient program that has been in operation since 1996. The program serves adjudicated male and female juveniles ranging from 9-16 year of age. The participants are typically on probation while completing the program requirements. At the time of the assessment, the program was serving 8 clients with a capacity of 12. The program includes that director and two part time staff members. The primary treatment provided is based on the Corrective Thinking curriculum published by Truthought. Finally, the participants are involved in the treatment for an average of 8 to 9 months.

Procedures

The Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI, Gendreau and Andrews, 1992) is used to ascertain how closely a correctional treatment program meets known principles of effective correctional treatment. There are six primary sections of the CPAI: 1) program implementation and the qualifications of the program director; 2) client pre-service assessment; 3) characteristics of the program; 4) characteristics and practices of the staff; 5) quality assurance and evaluation; and 6) miscellaneous items such as ethical guidelines and levels of community support.

Each section is scored as either “very satisfactory” (70% to 100%); “satisfactory” (60% to 69%); “satisfactory, but needs improvement” (50% to 59%); or “unsatisfactory” (less than 50%). The scores from all six areas are totaled and the same scale is used for the overall assessment score. It should be noted that not all of the six areas are given equal weight, and some items may be considered “not applicable,” in which case they are not included in the scoring.

Data were collected through structured interviews with selected program staff on January 9, 2001. Other sources of information included the examination of several representative case files, and other selected program materials.

Norm Information

Researchers at the University of Cincinnati have assessed over 170 programs nationwide using the CPAI. Approximately 8 percent of the programs assessed have been classified as “very satisfactory,” 23 percent “satisfactory,” 38 percent “satisfactory but needs improvement,” and 31 percent “unsatisfactory”. The average scores in each of the six areas are contained in the figure contained at the end of the report.

Program Implementation

The first section examines how much influence the current director had in designing and implementing the program, his qualifications and experience, his current involvement

with the staff and the program participants, and the overall implementation of the program.

Strengths:

The first area concerns the qualifications and involvement of the program director, or the person responsible for overseeing the daily treatment components of the program. The director was involved in the creation of the program in 1996. Prior to its implementation, the director coordinated a seminar on corrective thinking. After finding positive support for the model both from the community at large and the criminal justice community, a training for a smaller group of individuals that included social workers, police officers, and mental health workers was conducted.

Larry obtained his baccalaureate degree in psychology and a Masters degree in professional development. He is currently involved in hiring, supervising, and training staff to work in the program. In addition, the director certifies group facilitators, handles a caseload of offenders, and conducts groups.

The second area of focus is the creation of the program itself. Effective interventions have several dimensions: they are designed to be consistent with the treatment literature on effective programs; interventions and program components are piloted before full implementation; the values and goals of the program should be consistent with existing values in the community or the institution; the program meets a need; and the program is perceived as cost effective.

It appears that the program director did review the pertinent literature related to correctional rehabilitation. The director chose the corrective thinking cognitive behavioral curriculum because it included a component on client accountability. Before the program began, it appears that a six-month pilot was undertaken to sort out program logistics and content. The program was developed in response to the need for more effective community based programming as it is typically at or near capacity throughout the year. Finally, the program is considered cost effective by program staff.

Areas that Need Improvement

The program is lacking in consistent community and criminal justice community support. While the program director feels that the parents of the youth in the program are supportive, the overall community support has wavered in the last few years. Specifically, community meetings were held to discuss the consequences used by the program. While community involvement is not typically a disadvantage, the relationship between the program and the community appears to be strained by conflicting viewpoints. Moreover, a strained relationship also exists between the program and several members of the criminal justice community. Again, the director indicates that while many judges and caseworkers are supportive, others refuse to refer kids to the program, as they believe that the program relies too heavily on detention as a punishment.

In addition, it appears the program is lacking in administrative support for appropriate funding for staff and facilities.

Evaluation: Very Satisfactory

Recommendations

- The program must work reconcile differences and rebuild support from the criminal justice community and community at large. The program staff and the local criminal justice community should work together to ensure the program is implemented according to design and uses appropriate rewards and consequences. Overall, it appears the current funding is not adequate to sustain the program according to design.

Client Pre-Service Assessment

The extent to which clients are appropriate for the service provided, and the use of proven assessment methods is critical to effective treatment programs. Effective programs assess the risk, need, and responsivity of clients, and then provide services and treatment accordingly. The section on Client Pre-Service Assessment examines three areas regarding assessment: selection of clients, the assessment of risk, need, and personal characteristics of the client, and the manner in which these characteristics are assessed.

Strengths:

Clients assigned to the Competency Building Program exhibit a number of problems. Specifically, substance abuse, family dysfunction, and antisocial attitudes were identified by the program staff. The selection criteria includes juveniles charged with a class A misdemeanor or a pattern of lower level charges such as disorderly conduct. The program only accepts juveniles that score high or very high risk on the Yo-LSI and are 16 years old or younger. Finally, staff feel the majority of the participants are appropriate for the treatment provided.

An initial assessment is conducted on potential program participants. The assessment process includes the Youthful Level of Service Inventory, the Sassy, a detailed bio-social screening, the Shipley IQ test, MACI, and the Jesness Inventory. The Yo-LSI, the Sassy, the Shipley IQ, the MACI, and the Jesness Inventory are standardized and objective instruments that provide an overall score.

Areas that Need Improvement:

The program staff indicate that the Yo-LSI has been in use for the last year. Moreover, the program utilizes a variety of instruments designed to assess the client's needs and personal characteristics. However, the program has not conducted a recent validation

study to ascertain whether the assessment instruments used are appropriate for the local population.

Rating: Very Satisfactory

Recommendations

- The program should consider providing a validation of the assessment instruments on the local population.

Program Characteristics

This section examines whether the program targets criminogenic behaviors and attitudes, the types of treatment used to target these behaviors and attitudes, specific treatment procedures, the use of positive reinforcement and punishment, and methods used to prepare clients for return to the community. Other important elements of effective intervention include: the ratio of rewards to punishers, matching client's risk, needs, and personal characteristics with the appropriate treatment programs, treatment intensity, staff, and relapse prevention strategies designed to assist the client in anticipating and coping with problem situations.

Strengths:

The intervention used by the program is designed to target criminogenic needs and behaviors associated with recidivism, including:

- Changing attitudes, orientations, and values favorable to law violations and anti-criminal role models
- Changing antisocial feelings
- Increasing self control, self-management, and problem solving skills.
- Improving skills in interpersonal conflict resolution
- Promoting more positive attitudes and performance regarding work and education
- Relapse prevention

The type of treatment provided by the program is based on a cognitive behavioral theory that has been shown to be effective with the general offender population. In addition, the program utilizes structured manuals detailing the treatment provided in the groups.

The length of stay in the program varies and is determined by progress in treatment. Typically, the clients are involved in treatment for an average of 8-9 months.

The group facilitators are all trained and certified to deliver the corrective thinking curriculum to the youth.

The program has some rewards and punishers to encourage program participation and compliance. Rewards include: verbal praise and earning points that influence length of

stay in the program. Punishers include: verbal warnings, a presentation by the client to the group, a thinking report, an empathy letter, an apology letter, a 12-page thinking report, a 500 word contract detailing the plan for change, or involvement in a jeopardy track. The program director indicates that punishments are used to increase responsibility and reinforce the lessons used in groups.

Completion criteria established by the program as well as the providers appears to be based on progress in treatment. Specifically, the program uses a checklist to determine the participant's progress through treatment and the staff meet to discuss whether they feel the client's behavior is acceptable and warrants a successful termination from the program.

Effective correctional intervention programs train clients to monitor problem situations, rehearse alternative prosocial responses, and practice prosocial behaviors in increasingly difficult situations. The program appears to provide training to the youth in this area. Moreover, the program provides the clients with additional responsibilities by allowing the youths to eventually become peer helpers. The peer helpers are expected to act as role models and help others identify and work through their problems.

Upon leaving the program, the clients are routinely referred to other agencies relevant to their areas of need.

Areas that Need Improvement:

The whereabouts of clients (and their associations with peers) in the program are not adequately monitored. Although a few of the clients are on electronic monitoring or house arrest, the majority of the clients are not receiving supervision while in the community. The program is unable to consistently monitor who the client is associating with or his or her behavior outside of the group setting.

The client's time should be more structured and designed to engage the client in prosocial activities. The program should make every effort to involve all clients in intensive and structured treatment activities, especially during the evening and weekends hours. This may also require that the program subsidize the treatment groups.

There does not appear to be a systematic matching of clients and staff, or clients to groups based on the risk or responsivity characteristics assessed at intake.

Research indicates that rewards should be used at a much higher rate than punishers. The program does use some rewards, however, the frequency of rewards should be greater (approximately 4:1).

The program director notes that the use of detention and other strict punishments has decreased in recent months. However, it appears the program still relies too heavily on consequences or punishments to encourage program compliance instead of the use of a system of rewards.

Community/family contact and support are essential to successful reintegration and become even more important once a client is discharged. There is no evidence that the program works with or trains family members to assist clients when they are released from supervision.

Currently, there are no mechanisms in place to allow inmates that have completed the program to return for booster sessions and participate in groups or other activities.

Evaluation: Unsatisfactory

Recommendations:

- The whereabouts of the clients should be consistently monitored through contacts with teachers and parents. This may be accomplished through phone contacts with the school system, random curfew checks, and forms completed by parents detailing behavior while at home.
- The program should match clients to appropriate treatment groups based on risk, need, and responsivity levels. This will involve using risk/need data, incorporating responsivity characteristics of the clients, and developing additional treatment options and groups. For example, the program will want to consider matching clients to groups and counselors based on levels of cognitive functioning, motivation level, learning styles, level of anxiety, and communication style. For example, low functioning clients will have difficulty with a group facilitator or counselor that uses a highly verbal approach to treatment. Moreover, highly anxious clients will not respond well to a highly confrontational group or counselor.
- Treatment intensity, or “dosage” should be clearly matched to the client’s level of risk as measured by standardized assessment instruments. The programs should vary duration of the program based on the risk and need of the program. The program could also use reassessment results to determine progress and any additional needs.
- While in the program clients should be involved in structured activities between 40-70 percent of their time. Given the program targets high risk youth, the program should consider referring all clients to additional groups to meet their criminogenic needs.
- Appropriate behavior and participation in treatment should be consistently rewarded. While the program has incorporated a few rewards, a more comprehensive system of rewards should be developed. All staff should be trained on the use and application of appropriate rewards.
- The application of rewards should outnumber punishers by at least 4:1.

- The program should continue to limit the use of the short term detention as a consequence.
- For punishers to achieve maximum effectiveness, they should be administered in the following manner: escape is impossible, maximum intensity, earliest point in the deviant response, after every occurrence, immediate, alternative prosocial behaviors provided after punishment administered, and variation in the punishers. The staff should be trained how to implement a system of consequences to increase consistency and engender behavioral change.
- Staff should also be trained to look for negative consequences of punishment (emotional reactions, avoidance/aggression toward punishers, increased use of future punishment by offenders, etc.).
- The program should train family members to assist clients when they are released from the program. The program needs to develop a family intervention program, or arrange for services through an existing family service agency. The curriculum developed or adopted should include a detailed description of the intervention, the objectives, performance measures, and activities.
- Offenders should be required to return for booster sessions.

Staff Characteristics

This section concerns the qualifications, experience, stability, training, and involvement of the program staff¹.

Strengths:

The staff do meet our criteria for education. The program currently employs two part time staff members. Both hold baccalaureate degrees in psychology and one holds a Masters degree in community counseling. It appears that staff are hired on personal qualities relevant to the program. Specifically, flexibility, fairness, and responsibility were key characteristics mentioned by the program director. The treatment staff are provided with clinical supervision through bi-monthly meetings with a qualified therapist. Moreover, there is evidence that staff participate in on-going training workshops and seminars, feel they are able to modify the program structure, and strongly support the goals and values of treatment.

Areas that Need Improvement:

¹ The education and experience of the program director are discussed in the program implementation section.

Although the treatment providers are well qualified, the staff do not meet our criteria for experience or stability. Further, while staff do complete the four day Truthought curriculum training, the duration and extent of the overall training process is limited. Finally, while staff are required to complete a yearly self appraisal, they are not routinely assessed on clinical skills related directly to service delivery.

Evaluation: Satisfactory

Recommendations

- It is recommended that 75 percent of the staff work in a treatment facility for at least two years prior to working with the current program.
- It is recommended that at least 50 percent of the staff have remained on the job for at least two years.
- New staff should receive three to six months of formal training in theory and practice of interventions employed by the program. It is important that the staff understand the treatment and intervention employed by the providers so that they can appropriately model and reinforce prosocial behaviors.
- All staff should be regularly assessed on criteria specifically related to the delivery of services.

Evaluation

This section centers on the type of feedback, assessments, and evaluations used to monitor how well the program is functioning.

Strengths:

The program provides internal quality assurance through periodic file reviews, staffings, attendance and participation logs for the groups. The program also tracks clients once they leave the program to monitor their progress. Finally, several evaluations have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of the program.

Areas that Need Improvement:

While the director notes the program is in the process of developing a satisfaction survey for the clients, it has not yet been implemented. Although the clients are assessed at intake with the Yo-LSI, the program does not periodically reassess clients' risk while in the program. Finally, the program evaluations have not been scrutinized by a peer reviewed journal to assess the methodological quality.

Evaluation: Unsatisfactory

Recommendations:

- The program should construct and administer client satisfaction surveys.
- The program should reassess clients using an objective instrument such as the LSI. The reassessment information provides valuable feedback to the staff and treatment providers and should be used to improve program placement or modify previous treatment plans.
- While evaluations have been conducted, the program should make additional efforts to develop adequate comparison groups and publish the results in a peer reviewed outlet.

Other

The final section in the CPAI includes miscellaneous items pertaining to the program such as disruptive changes in program, funding, or community support, ethical guidelines and the comprehensiveness of participant's files.

Strengths:

Client records are maintained in confidential files and include assessment information, treatment plans, and progress notes. There is a documented code of ethics that guide staff behavior with the clients. It appears there has been little change in funding over the last few years.

Areas that Need Improvement:

The program has experienced some negative changes in community support during the last few years. As previously mentioned, the animosity between the program and some members of the criminal justice community has been detrimental to the development of the program. The program does not have a formal advisory board designed to oversee the implementation and activities of the program.

Evaluation: Unsatisfactory

- Efforts should be made to resolve the remaining issues and parties should work together to develop an implement the most effective option for the youth.
- The program should consider developing an advisory board to oversee program development.

OVERALL PROGRAM RATING:

The Competency Building Program received an overall score of 61.3 percent on the CPAI. This score is in the “satisfactory” category.