

CSSD Chronicle

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch
Court Support Services Division
Friday, June 14, 2013



Forensic CBT Added to CSSD Evidence-based Practices



The Judicial Branch, Court Support Services Division (CSSD) is recognized as a leader in using evidence-based practices to improve supervision of court-involved individuals and reduce recidivism.

CSSD's risk reduction strategy began in 2000 when adult probation officers were trained in the use of Motivational Interviewing techniques and validated risk/need assessment tools. These skills are used to define the appropriate supervision level of a client, identify criminogenic risk and protective factors, and determine the extent of a client's drug or alcohol use so that appropriate referrals for treatment are made. Over the years, CSSD data collection and analysis of 24-month re-arrest (recidivism) rates has shown a steady and consistent drop since these practices were put into place.

In May 2012, the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) completed a survey among probation officers that assessed their continued utilization and understanding of these evidence-based supervision strategies. The CCSU survey report was used to support a CSSD grant proposal to improve the use of assessment tools--through training and technical assistance--and provide a foundation for the use of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) as an additional evidence-based practice.

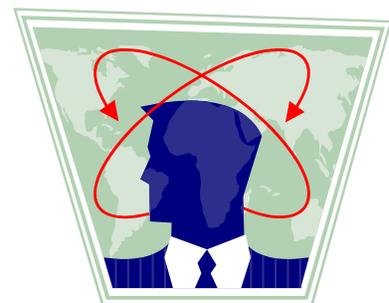
The grant proposal was a joint endeavor by CSSD, CCSU, and the Muskie School of Public Policy at the University of Southern Maine. It was one of the eight, out of 80 applications, that received approval from the 2012 Federal SMART Probation Grant program funded by the United States Bureau of Justice.

In the fall of 2012, program developers from the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at CCSU began working with 24 adult probation officers, along with several CSSD

trainers, in the use of *Forensic CBT*. The program developers are CCSU professors Raymond Tafrate, Ph.D.; Damon Mitchell, Ph.D.; and, Stephen Cox, Ph.D.

Cognitive behavior therapy has been used extensively for a wide variety of human problems and is well suited to be integrated into real-world offender supervision and treatment. CBT interventions are based on the premise that altering someone's cognitive processes can modify disturbances in their emotion and behavior. Coupled with CSSD's current risk/need assessment tools, using CBT techniques to address criminal thinking patterns has the potential to further promote positive change and reduce recidivism among offenders.

The current cohort of probation officers meets every other week at CCSU to be trained by Drs. Tafrate and Mitchell in one of the eight components of *Forensic CBT*. Topics covered include administration and evaluation of new and current client assessment instruments; exploring a probationer's values and how they are connected—or disconnected—to their antisocial patterns of thinking and ac-



tion; sharing case studies with clients that highlight a criminal thinking pattern and its negative consequences; teaching client self-monitoring techniques; and, role playing with clients to help them practice alternative thinking and behavior patterns when confronted with situations that facilitate a specific criminal thinking pattern.

Between training sessions, the officers practice what they have learned by integrating the new change tactic into their client appointments. Officers record the appointment interactions electronically so that Drs. Tafrate and Mitchell can provide feedback and coaching during subsequent training sessions.

The 24 adult probation officers currently being trained in *Forensic CBT* are:

Pat Odell and Heather Wolny (Bantam)
Cynthia Jamison and Rui Rainho (Bridgeport)
Sarah Wexler (Bristol)
Sara Basford (Danbury)
Samantha Morrissette and Sara Stone (Danielson)
Heather Cato and Catalina Rosado (Hartford)
Jennifer Belfort and Christie Filanowski (Meriden)
Lisa Correa and Michael Sullivan (Middletown)
Jesus Alex Diaz and Allison Eddy (New Britain)
Margarita Gonzalez and Richard Sutterlin (New Haven)
Reginald Stanford and John Watts (New London)
Bethany Stone (Norwich)
Gina Mital and Andres Roman (Stamford)
Terri Johnson (Waterbury)

A second cohort of 20 officers, in consultation with the CCSU program developers, will be trained with the assistance of the CSSD Training Academy in an effort to sustain the project after the grant monies have been used. A total of 1,000 probationers will be part of the project over two years, with 250 high risk probationers benefitting from the full *Forensic CBT* intervention. The proposed project also seeks to improve the case collaboration with existing community programs.

For more information on *Forensic CBT*, please contact Dr. Stephen Cox at coxs@mail.ccsu.edu

The CSSD Chronicle is a regular publication of information and news about the Court Support Services Division. Questions or comments on this edition, or suggestions for future articles, can be directed to Linda.Grzeika@jud.ct.gov