

From Policy to Practice

Evidence-Based Implementation for Capacity (EPIC)

Video Transcript

Chris Asplen: My name is Chris Asplen. I am the executive director of the National Criminal Justice Association and the NCJA Center for Justice Planning. This is one in a series of videos where we examine and explore innovative programs that are being developed and implemented by state criminal justice planning agencies, or state administering agencies, shortened to SAAs, where they are helping localities identify, implement, and evaluate evidence-based programs that ultimately help reduce crime and prevent recidivism.

With me today is Jeanne Smith. Jeanne is the director of the Colorado Department of Public Safety's Criminal Justice Division. Today we're here to talk about the EPIC program. Jeanne, if you could start off by telling us really what does EPIC stand for, and ultimately what's the goal of EPIC?

Jeanne Smith: Thanks, Chris. I really appreciate the invitation to be here and share this. We're excited about EPIC. EPIC stands for Evidence-Based Practices Implementation for Capacity. Kind of a mouthful, but what it's supposed to do is take evidence-based practices and assist criminal justice agencies in implementing those practices. We all know that there are things that work in criminal justice, and we go to trainings, and we come back from those trainings and we check the box and say, "Now I know about cognitive behavioral therapy, or thinking for a change," or whatever the new method is.

What we don't do is carry that training through and make it become an integral part of the operation of an agency. Implementation science tells us that there is a way to affect change and to make that integration possible. That's what we're doing with our EPIC teams, is trying to carry implementation science into the field.

Chris Asplen: That sounds like a really important goal. Can you tell us a little bit of how EPIC actually works and how it gets implemented?

Jeanne Smith: We have teams of people who are trained in implementation science. What they do when they're working with an agency is, first of all, analyze the practice that the agency wants to change. Maybe they want suggestions on what evidence-based practices are out in the field that might be of assistance for them.

Then also what we do is analyze their organizational readiness. By that we mean to really change culture. It can't be sending one level of employee to a training. You have to have management support, leadership support, top to bottom. You have to have the time to focus on the implementation. They do that analysis and work with the agency to say, "Here are the things you need to put in place in order to lay on

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this new implementation of whatever the program might be."

Chris Asplen: Who are some of the experts that you use?

Jeanne Smith: We have teams of experts who have gone to trainings. We have nine people in our EPIC unit, which is not nearly enough to cover the whole state. They have attended a lot of national trainings and learned from real experts in the management field on how to implement change.

They then go out to agencies and try and create champions within each agency. We can't be there 100% of the time, so there needs to be someone inside who takes on the effort and really adopts it as their own and becomes the internal champion.

Chris Asplen: Can you give us an example of a particular kind of training that your experts might come in and do for an agency?

Jeanne Smith: One of the first practices that we started out training and coaching, and implementing, was motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing has been around a long time and it's been shown to be a very effective way of working with anyone, but particularly working with offenders and getting them to buy in to the change that we're asking them to do.

We took motivational interviewing into probation offices, parole offices, community corrections, and inside facilities and prisons to train people in how better to work with offenders.

Chris Asplen: Now is there a follow-up or is there an opportunity after the training for those agencies that are involved in the training to continue to get help as they try to implement that particular skill or program?

Jeanne Smith: Absolutely. That's the key to implementation. You can't just train and pray, and think that the effect that you want is going to be achieved. There's got to be training, coaching, and ongoing contact with people who are encouraging the change. A lot of times we do that through circles of support within communities, where professionals will get together with each other on a monthly basis and talk about the problems they're encountering, and also with leadership to get together. There has to be that ongoing push to change or the river goes right back to where it wanted to flow before.

Chris Asplen: Right. Can you give us a few more examples just of who might be interested in that kind of training? What kind of agencies?

Jeanne Smith: In the criminal justice world we have dealt with offenders the same way for so

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many years. What we're trying to do is change how that is accomplished. Anyone who works with offenders ... we've done this training with community corrections case managers, probation officers, parole officers. We've now expanded it. Some of the prison facilities want to do it with their security guards because they're people who have daily contact with offenders and can change the way they react with them.

Chris Asplen: Now how long has EPIC been implemented?

Jeanne Smith: We started EPIC in 2009 under an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant. That helped us get started. For four years we were grant-funded. At the end of four years, our legislature was convinced that this was going to be a good return on investment, and it is now a state-funded project under the general fund.

Chris Asplen: Needless to say that the evaluation of the program has proven it to be effective such that the state was able to take over the funding itself.

Jeanne Smith: It really has. To give you an example, we did a study of our parole officers who had reached certain levels of competency with motivational interviewing. What was found in their populations of offenders prior to going through motivational interviewing, training, and coaching, there was a 30% reduction in recidivism in the populations after that parole officer had gone through motivational interviewing implementation, not just training.

Chris Asplen: That's great. Jeanne, thank you so much for explaining the program to us. For those of you who might be interested in that kind of program, please contact NCJA. We will be happy to put you in touch not only with Jeanne but with other resources that would be available to you so that you too can begin to implement really important and really successful programs that, as we said, accomplish the goal of reducing crime and reducing recidivism. Thanks for joining us.

Jeanne Smith: Thank you.