



Utah State Courts

THE EVIDENCE-BASED CORRECTIONAL PROGRAM CHECKLIST

Families First
Salt Lake City, Utah

Fifth Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION¹

The Utah Juvenile Court in conjunction with the researchers from the University of Utah conducted a re-evaluation of the Families First program using the Correctional Program Checklist (CPC). The objective of this assessment is to conduct a detailed review of the programming and services offered in the Families First program and to compare the structure of the program with the research on best practices in juvenile and correctional interventions. The following report provides a summary of the program, the procedures used to assess the program, and the evaluation findings with recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the services delivered by Families First.

This is the fifth CPC evaluation of this program. The previous CPC assessment of Families First occurred in July 2008, September 2009, August 2010, and August 2011. This report will summarize some of the changes that have taken place since the fourth assessment, which have continued to result in overall improvement in the program. The report also includes recommendations for further improvement. For a detailed review of the previous changes made to the program see the previous reports.

SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAM

Program Description

The Families First program, located in Salt Lake City, Utah, is one of several programs operated by the Utah Youth Village. The program provides in-home, family-based services to youth and their families using an adaptation of the Teaching Family Model. The program has been providing services since in 1994 and serves male and female youth and their families. At the time of this evaluation, the program was serving 26 State Supervision youth. Currently, the program includes one program director, one intake coordinator, four coordinators, and 29 family specialists (an increase from 26 in 2011). Funding for the program comes from a variety of sources including internal sources, insurance, private pay, and the state. The program has an annual budget around \$1.3 million; approximately \$250,000 of this comes from the Juvenile Court.

PROCEDURES²

The Correctional Program Checklist

The evidence based Correctional Program Checklist (CPC) is a tool developed to assess delinquency and correctional intervention programs.³ It is used to ascertain how closely correctional programs meet known principles of effective intervention. Studies conducted by the University of Cincinnati on both adult and juvenile programs were used to develop and validate the indicators used by the CPC⁴. These studies found strong correlations⁴ with outcome items on overall scores, domain areas, and individual items (Holsinger, 1999; Lowenkamp and Latessa, 2003; Lowenkamp, 2003; Lowenkamp and Latessa, 2005a; Lowenkamp and Latessa, 2005b), and were used in formulating the CPC.

The CPC is divided into two basic areas: content and capacity. The capacity area is designed to measure whether a correctional program has the capability to deliver evidence-based interventions and services for offenders. This area covers the following three domains: Leadership and Development, Staff, and Quality Assurance. The content area focuses on the domains of Offender Assessment and Treatment Characteristics. This area includes an assessment of the extent to which the program meets the principles of risk, need, responsivity, and treatment. There are a total of 77 indicators worth up to 83 total points. Each area, and all domains, are scored and rated as highly effective if the score is between 61 and 100 percent, effective if the score is between 51 and 60 percent, needs improvement if the score is between 40 and 50 percent, or ineffective if the score is 39 percent or below.

The scores in all five domains are totaled and the same scale is used for the overall assessment score. It should be noted that not all of the five domains are given equal weight and that some items may be considered not applicable, in which case they are excluded from the scoring.

There are several limitations to the CPC. First, as with any research process, objectivity and reliability are an issue. Although steps are taken to ensure that the information collected is reliable and accurate, given the nature of the process, judgments about the data gathered are invariably made by the assessor. Second, the process is time specific. That is, the assessment is based on how the program is functioning at the time the assessment is conducted. Changes or modifications may be planned for the future or may be under consideration; however, only those activities and processes that are present at the time of the review are used in the scoring. Third,

the process does not take into account all system issues that can affect program integrity. Finally, the process does not address the reasons that a problem exists within a program or why certain practices do or do not take place. Rather, the process is designed to determine the overall integrity of the program.

Despite these limitations, there are a number of advantages to CPC evaluations. First, the criteria are based on empirically derived principles of effective programs. Second, all of the indicators included in the CPC have been found to be correlated with reductions in recidivism. Third, the process provides a measure of program integrity and quality; it provides insight into the “black box” of a program, something an outcome study alone does not provide. Fourth, the results can be obtained relatively quickly. Fifth, it identifies both the strengths and weaknesses of a program; it provides the program with an idea of what it is doing that is consistent with the research on effective interventions, as well as those areas that need improvement. Sixth, it provides some recommendations for program improvement. Finally, it allows for benchmarking. Comparisons with other programs that have been assessed using the same criteria are provided. Since program integrity and quality can change over time, it allows a program to reassess its progress.

Norm Information

Researchers at the University of Cincinnati have assessed over 400 programs nationwide and have developed a large database on correctional intervention programs⁵. Approximately seven percent of the programs assessed have been classified as very effective, 18 percent effective, 33 percent needs improvement, and 42 percent not effective.⁶

Assessment Process

This CPC evaluation took place at Families First on October 9 and 10, 2012. The assessment process consisted of a series of structured interviews with program staff. Service delivery was also observed during in-home sessions. Additional data was gathered through case files as well as other relevant program materials including treatment manuals, assessment instruments, ethical guidelines, staff evaluations, and previous program evaluations. Data from these sources were used to determine a consensus CPC score and provide the recommendations below.

FINDINGS

Program Leadership and Development

Rating: Highly Effective

The first CPC domain examines the program director's qualifications and previous experiences as well as his current involvement with the staff and program participants. This section evaluates whether the literature is consulted when designing or modifying program components and whether the intended effect of new program components is pilot tested. This section of the CPC also assesses the support received by the program from the at-large and criminal justice communities. Finally, this domain considers the stability of the program, including whether funding levels are sufficient for the services offered.

Strengths

The first sub-component of this section examines the qualifications of the program director who is defined as the person responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the program. It also looks at the director's level of involvement in selecting, training, and supervising the staff, and providing some direct services. The program director of Families First, Wayne Arner, is well qualified for his position. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor (Master's level license) and has 14 years of experience at Families First, 8 of which he has served as program director. Mr. Arner continues to be directly involved in selecting, training, and supervising the staff. Mr. Arner also carries a caseload of one juvenile court involved youth and his or her family per quarter, for a total of four youth and their families per year. Mr. Arner's education, experience, and involvement in the program are all considered major strengths of the program.

The second sub-component of this section covers three factors related to quality program development: the initial design of the program, pilot testing of the program or program modifications, and the perceived support by the criminal justice and local community.

Families First program is an adaptation of the Teaching Families curriculum, which has received empirical support as an effective cognitive behavioral intervention with juveniles exhibiting problem behaviors in residential settings. Mr. Arner is familiar with the research on effective intervention with juvenile delinquents and appears to have continued to increase his understanding in this area since the last evaluation. Additionally, the program staff (coordinators and specialists) are all well educated on this literature. They reported they review this material in

their initial training and throughout the year in ongoing trainings with Mr. Arner. This is also a major strength of the program, as the staff are well aware of current literature on the treatment of court involved youth versus other populations. Lastly, in this sub-component, the Families First staff continue to report that the program is supported by both the criminal justice community and the local community.

The third sub-component of this section involves the age of the program, adequate funding, and gender of groups. The program has been serving the juvenile court population for approximately 15 years. This demonstrates program stability and is a positive aspect of the program. Funding continues to be reported adequate for the services the program implements.

The program does not provide any group treatment; therefore, there is no mixing of gender in groups. The program, instead, provides in home services. This is a major strength of the program as it avoids the negative peer influences when delinquent youth are brought together, particularly when mixing genders.

Areas that Need Improvement

Though pilot testing is discussed in this section, it is noted that the program has done well to pilot test Families First's involvement with outside programs, namely NOJOS Level III youth at Life Matters Counseling. The program director collected data and tracked youth appropriately for the pilot testing period. Unfortunately, this pilot testing was affected by changes in the Juvenile Court contract. This pilot testing is considered to be a strength of the program and should be continued in the future. Nevertheless, other changes were made to the program that did not include a pilot testing period. The program implemented a new component where a youth's prosocial and structured activities, including adequate supervision, are assessed by the specialists, and improvement in this area, if needed, is incorporated into the treatment plan. Though this is a strength of the program, changes such as this should also be pilot tested.

Recommendations

1. When making a change or modification to the program, a pilot period of at least one month should be conducted with a formal start and end date. The pilot period should conclude with a thorough review of the new program component and modifications should be made accordingly before final implementation.

This section of the CPC concerns the qualifications, experience, stability, training, supervision, and involvement of the program staff. Staff considered in this section includes all full-time and part-time staff who provide direct services or treatment to the participants. Excluded from this group are security staff and clerical/support staff, as well as the program director who was evaluated in the previous section.

Strengths

The program staff have adequate educational levels in applicable areas, i.e., helping professions. Additionally, the specialists are reported to be hired based on skills and values related to effective service delivery.

Staff meetings are held on a weekly basis, where programmatic agenda items are reviewed in addition to ongoing trainings and staffing individual cases. Additionally, the specialists meet with their coordinators to review cases on a regular basis, and the coordinators meet regularly with Mr. Arner.

The staff continue to report receiving highly organized and intensive training when they are hired to be specialists at Families First. This training includes both didactic classroom training, shadowing the coordinators, and being observed and assessed with their own client families. After the classroom training staff shadow their coordinator to observe the process of teaching a family. After approximately two to three weeks of observing, the new staff receive a “50-50” family that they are assigned to, along with their coordinator. For the next year the observations become less frequent, tapering off from once a week to once a month. As with the previous evaluation and mentioned above, staff training and knowledge on effective interventions with court involved youth is exceptional. Additionally, the staff reporting receiving ample hours of ongoing training. The initial and ongoing training is a major strength of the program, particularly that the competency levels have remained high since the previous CPC.

Overall, the staff continue to express strong support for the program. The staff continue to feel the program has a collaborative environment where their input is considered and incorporated when possible. Lastly, the staff are required to abide by ethical guidelines for the Families First program, in addition to the ethical guidelines from their related professional fields when applicable.

Areas that Need Improvement

Though the majority of the staff have appropriate educational levels in applicable areas, some staff did not have a minimum of two years of experience working with court involved/delinquent youth. It does, however, appear that efforts have been made to retain qualified staff since the previous CPC evaluations. This is a strength of the program and efforts should be continued.

Most of the staff reported being assessed on their service delivery, which included observation, formal verbal and written feedback, once a month. However, not all of the coordinators reported receiving these assessments.

Recommendations

1. The program should attempt to hire and retain staff with a minimum of two years experience in working within youth/delinquency treatment programs.
2. All staff who provide direct services, including training families, should receive regular evaluation and feedback on their service delivery skills.

Offender Assessment

Rating: Highly Effective

This section of the CPC reviews the extent to which offenders are appropriate for the service. The domain examines how the offenders are selected for the program and how individual factors of the offender related to risk, need, and responsivity are measured. Proven assessment methods can be used to measure factors related to the offender and program fit. These methods measure the risk, need, and responsivity of offenders. Program services should then be tailored to the individual based upon results from these assessments.

Strengths

Youth on State Supervision probation are referred to Families First through Third District Juvenile Court. As with the previous evaluation, the program staff were able to articulate what type of youth (and families) were appropriate for the program and who should be excluded for participation (e.g., families with active domestic violence, actively suicidal, and with substance abuse who are not receiving substance abuse treatment). The staff also report that inappropriate youth are not regularly, if ever, admitted to the program. This is a major strength of the program,

as the staff have a good understanding of the youth they are treating and the scope of their training.

Additionally, as with the previous CPC evaluation, the program's assessment of risk and need factors continues to be a strength of the program. The staff reported they always receive PRA information and demonstrated a good working knowledge of how to target the risk and need areas into treatment. Third District Juvenile Court probation officers complete a Protection and Risk Assessment (PRA) for all youth sent to the Families First program. In addition, probation staff have provided training to Families First staff on how to use and apply the PRA assessment with Juvenile Court involved youth. Observation of in-home services also suggests that information from this instrument is used to guide treatment. This is a major strength of the program. Lastly, moderate and high-risk youth continue to make up the majority of the youth who are admitted into the program.

In the previous evaluation, it was noted that assessment of responsivity had improved since the 2010. This improvement has been well maintained, as the staff reported continued use of the Jesness and the CEST to modify their treatment approach. This process to assess responsivity is also a major strength of the program.

Areas that Need Improvement

Summary scores measuring a youth's need or responsivity levels are not used.

Recommendations

1. Summary scores measuring a youth's need or responsivity levels are not used.

Treatment Characteristics

Rating: Highly Effective

This domain of the CPC examines whether or not the program targets criminogenic needs and antisocial behavior, the types of treatment used to change these needs or behaviors, the use of reinforcers and punishers to shape prosocial behavior, the methods used to train offenders in new pro-social skills, and the provision of quality aftercare services. Other important elements of effective intervention assessed in this section include matching the risk, needs, and personal characteristics of offenders with appropriate interventions, treatment intensity, and staff. Finally,

the use of relapse prevention strategies designed to assist the offender in anticipating and coping with problem situations is considered.

Strengths

Families First continues to use the Teaching Families model, which is a family-based model with empirical support for residential services with juveniles. The program uses this model for in-home services targeting criminogenic behaviors identified on the PRA. This is a strength of the program. The staff continue to use a formal manual that is intended to unify treatment amongst the family specialists. As noted in the previous report, the program staff worked to reduce the number of skills that specialists may teach to a core set, each of which is tied to a specific criminogenic factor identified on the PRA. As evidenced in interviews with the staff and observations of in-home services, the staff exhibited a strong knowledge of the skills as well as when and how to apply them. The program also makes efforts to match the needs and responsivity factors of the youth to the staff's strengths in such areas as age, gender, native language, and presenting problems. These continue to be strengths of the program.

As discussed above, new to the intake process is an assessment of the youths' involvement in structured activities and adequate supervision. The staff reported the youth must be involved in prosocial activities a minimum of 70% of their time during the week. If youth do not meet this threshold, the specialist will incorporate this into the treatment plan, helping the youth to find structured, prosocial activities and improve supervision.

Staff continue to identify a consistent list of rewards and punishers that are utilized to encourage treatment compliance and participation. Some examples of the rewards used included food, treats/candy, and privileges. The use of rewards appears outnumber the use of punishers. As an improvement since the previous CPC evaluation, staff reported more consistent modeling of procedures of use of punishers and awareness of the need to monitor for negative effects of punishers.

As with the previous evaluation, the criteria to move from one phase to the next is outlined clearly and specialists must fill out a "Phase Sheet" to determine when the youth and/or parent are ready to move to the next phase of treatment. Additionally, the criteria for successfully completing the program are outlined clearly for treatment staff, youth, and families. A review of the case files revealed all youth continue to have a discharge plan in their files. The plan includes

how a youth's criminogenic needs were addressed and what progress was made. These are major strengths of the program.

The specialists consistently report that prosocial skills are taught and modeled for youth. Additionally, the youth and their families are asked to practice target skills in frequent role plays and are given feedback by the specialists. This practice was observed during in-home visits. The process of teaching and reinforcing skills is a major strength of the program.

Parents are trained in behaviorally-based parenting practices during the home visits. The home visits focus on behavioral skills, effective consequencing practices, and use of reinforcers related to the criminogenic needs of a youth.

The process by which you receive aftercare has improved since the previous CPC assessment. The staff reported a face-to-face visit with families at 30 days, followed by phone calls every three months for one year, post-termination. This is a good improvement and new strength of the program.

Lastly, youth have the ability to provide their input regarding the services provided while enrolled in the program.

Areas that Need Improvement

The length of treatment varies according to the needs of the youth. While this is a positive aspect of treatment, treatment should at a minimum be twelve weeks in length. Also, while treatment is intensified if the youth or family is in crisis; it is not intensified according to the risk level of the youth.

The youth's location is not monitored outside of the in-home visits, or if monitored by probation, this information is not regularly communicated back to the program staff.

Lastly, although aftercare is reported to be consistently provided, the aftercare is minimal.

Recommendations

1. Treatment should at a minimum be twelve weeks in length.
2. The intensity of program should vary according to the risk level of the youth.
3. Aftercare should include formal planning, which begins during the treatment phase, a reassessment of risk at need, and booster sessions provided at a duration and intensity appropriate for the risk level of the youth.

This CPC domain centers on the quality assurance and evaluation processes used to monitor how well the program is functioning. Specifically, this section examines the type of feedback, assessments, and evaluations used to measure program quality.

Strengths

This section is the area of the largest improvement since the previous CPC evaluation. The program improved from ‘Needs Improvement’ to ‘Highly Effective.’ This improvement in score is due to a program evaluation with a qualified researcher, conducted within the past five years, included a comparison group with greater improvements in the treatment group.

Ongoing strengths include the internal quality assurance checks completed by the program director, which include assessment of service delivery, review of client files, and satisfaction surveys completed by the youth.

Also, recidivism rates calculated by the University of Utah are checked by the program director on an ongoing basis.

Areas that Need Improvement

Though the program continues to treat youth in coordinated efforts with other treatment providers, Families First is not currently conducting external quality assurance checks, due to the changes in contracts.

Lastly, youth are not reassessed on criminogenic targets while participating in the treatment program.

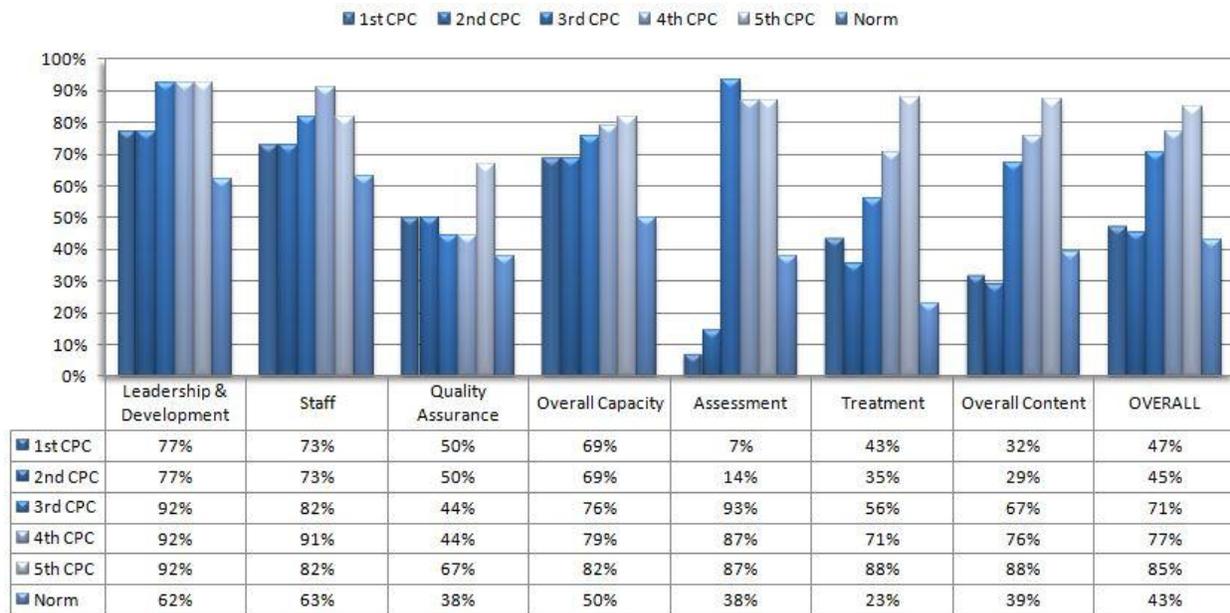
Recommendations

1. The program should conduct external quality assurance checks on the outside provider to evaluate the effectiveness of the services provided.
2. The youth’ progress toward treatment goals related to criminogenic need should be assessed throughout the program. This may include, periodically administering tests or surveys to evaluate changes in the youth’s attitude, behaviors, or skills while in the program.

OVERALL PROGRAM RATING

The overall score for the Families First is 85 percent, which places it in the Highly Effective category. The overall *capacity* score, which is designed to measure whether the program has the capability to deliver evidence based interventions and services for offenders, is 82 percent which falls into the Highly Effective category. Families First scored an 88 percent on overall *content*, which measures the extent to which the program meets the principles of risk, need, responsivity, and treatment. This score places the program in the Highly Effective category on overall *content*.

Families First Correctional Program Checklist Scores



Recommended Target Areas for Improvement

While the CPC evaluation highlights many areas for improvement, it is recommended that the program focus on the following areas in the upcoming year.

1. All staff who provide direct services, including training families, should receive regular evaluation and feedback on their service delivery skills.
2. When making a change or modification to the program, a pilot period of at least one month should be conducted with a formal start and end date. The pilot period should conclude with a thorough review of the new program component and modifications should be made accordingly before final implementation.
3. The quality of the Families First program, as measured by the overall CPC score, has improved to the point where the program is consistently scoring in the Highly Effective category. ***It is recommended that maintaining this improvement be a focus of the program in the upcoming year. Continued efforts should be made to implement procedures that will maintain the current quality.*** As with the 2011 evaluation recommendations, these procedures should focus on making sure that the training provided to new staff continues in the present form and focuses on teaching the concepts related to intervening with juvenile offenders and teaching prosocial skills. The current staff should be encouraged to maintain the high quality of services they currently provide. They should also be closely monitored to ensure that changes in practice do not result in a drift away from the current program structure.

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ENDNOTES

¹ This report is based on a template provided by Dr. Deborah Shaffer (2007) and includes direct quotes from the original manuscript. It is used with the author's permission.

² This section was provided by Dr. Deborah Shaffer (2007) and is used with the author's permission.

³ The CPC is modeled after the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory developed by Gendreau and Andrews; however, the CPC includes a number of items not contained in the CPAI. In addition, items that were not found to be positively correlated with recidivism were deleted.

⁴ These studies involved over 40,000 offenders (both adult and juvenile), and over 400 correctional programs, ranging from institutional to community based. All of the studies are available on our web site (www.uc.edu/criminaljustice). A large part of this research involved the identification of program characteristics that were correlated with outcome.

⁵ Several versions of the CPAI were used prior to the development of the CPC. Scores and averages have been adjusted as needed.

⁶ The previous categories used were "very satisfactory," "satisfactory," "needs improvement," and "unsatisfactory."