

Monitoring reintegration program participation in corrections

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Offender participation in correctional programs is a priority of the Correctional Service of Canada. Evaluation of an offender's participation in correctional programs is an integral part of managing each offender's risk and reintegration potential. It is, therefore, one measure that reflects directly to public safety. Aside from correctional programs, there are many services, activities, therapeutic interventions and other programs available to federal offenders that contribute in various ways to the risk management of offenders. Correctional programs² distinguish themselves by addressing the multiple risk factors that contribute directly to criminal behaviour. A correctional program has clearly articulated objectives, participant selection criteria, a process for evaluating participant progress, and a process for measuring program effectiveness. Trained staff delivers correctional programs. The commitment to correctional program design and delivery in accordance with these principles is also a priority of the Correctional Service of Canada. The practice of program accreditation, and site accreditation, reflect the commitments to ensure program design and delivery are monitored and meet these standards.³

The operational requirements of correctional program delivery are complex yet similar to an organization that is required to manage delivery of essential services. The shared responsibilities of case management and correctional program staff are key to the success of the process. Both groups communicate with each another to identify program demand and confirm program availability. Offender correctional program needs are identified and prioritized for action by case management staff as they develop each offender's correctional plan. Knowledge of program selection criteria, requirements for program-specific testing, and the link between the offender's crime cycle and individual program content is critical to matching offenders with appropriate correctional programs.

At the site where the program will be offered, a Program Board completes a review and confirms that the case management program referrals are appropriate. Correctional program officers, who have been trained to deliver the program, complete interviews with candidates to further assess their readiness to attend, reconfirm that the program selection criteria is met, and prioritize which

offenders will attend the next available session. Prioritization is required as some program candidates may have yet to complete prerequisite tests or programs. They may not have attained the minimum educational requirements for the program or may refuse to attend the program that has been identified. Program officers manage the list of offenders identified to attend their program, and continuously prioritize which offenders will enroll in the next available session.

Assessment

After an offender has been accepted into a correctional program, the program officer completes a structured interview with the candidate and administers a battery of psychometric tests. These tests are designed to assess the participants' attitudes, characteristics, knowledge and skills as they relate to their criminogenic needs. The results are collected prior to, during and following participation in the program. Each program officer receives training on administering, scoring and interpreting these psychometric tests.

The data from the psychometric test batteries are used to assess the extent to which the participant benefited from the program. This allows the program officer to comment on significant skill acquisition, attitudinal change and the extent to which the dynamic risk factors have been addressed for the offender. The correctional program officer formally completes a final report on the offender's program participation that is incorporated by case management staff in managing the offender's overall risk. The value-added nature of the test information to overall delivery and participation in correctional programs is significant. The information provides a point-in-time understanding of correctional program delivery, and helps to further understand the impact of correctional programs on participants. The test battery data deliver information as to whether the program is effective and that information can be used to drive improvements to program content and the training of program delivery staff.

A barrier to this process has been that much of the data collection continues to rely on manual procedures with little to no automation with the exception of some reliance on electronic templates

that assist with data entry and the scoring of the test measures. Many of the tests are completed by offenders and then interpreted by the program officer. Others are structured interviews that the program officer completes with the offender. All result in data that has to be interpreted and summarized for each offender. Following this, the test data for all participants are collected and sent to a central location for further data entry to collate the information for each correctional program on a national basis. This is generally an ineffective process where delays in receiving and verifying information can result in tests that have missing or incomplete data. The ability to rectify these situations in a timely fashion is affected by the lack of automation in the process. Given the value of the test measures to understanding correctional program effectiveness and the need to improve the turnaround of this data into information, automation of the process is required.

Test battery enhancement

Currently the Reintegration Programs Division is working closely with the Offender Management System Renewal project to develop and design an application to manage the test battery data from a central location. A correctional program performance measures application is under review for development in the near future. The proposed application will provide for data entry directly at the site where the program is offered and will permit quality control over timely data entry, and establish the ability to intervene and correct the situation as required. The impact will be a time saving to delivery staff, quality assurance personnel, site accreditation personnel, and regional and national program managers who are tasked with ensuring test batteries are administered appropriately. An extension of this application may one day see

offenders completing tests in dedicated kiosks. This possibility will relieve staff of the requirement of entering this information into automated systems. The design of the proposed performance measures application will establish a link between test battery data and OMS program assignment data that delivers a single point of entry that is validated against each program participant.

The benefit of the application will be to improve the availability of test battery data, while incorporating quality assurance as part of the design of the automated system. The test battery process will become much more visible, and as a result will improve the management of the process by placing greater emphasis on the analysis of the data over time spent collecting it. Replacing a test with a new version will be much easier from a centralized location that is able to deliver the new test immediately to staff while removing the old version at the same time. The ability to monitor correctional programs will improve significantly with automated information that will either confirm or drive changes to program content as well as the related training of staff, all in a manner that will improve our understanding of program effectiveness and each program's relation to managing offender risk. Monitoring correctional programs is critical to understanding their impact and the arrival of an automated performance measures application will improve our abilities significantly in this area. ■

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² Correctional Service of Canada, Commissioner's Directive 726.

³ Program accreditation involves a review overseen by an international panel of experts who assess the program against criteria. Site accreditation involves a review of operational sites to assess the delivery of programs against standards.

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