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A Case Study Of The Implementation Of Staff Training Aimed At Reducing Rearrest (STARR)

By: **Tammatha A. Clodfelter, Jefferson E. Holcomb,** Melissa A. Alexander, **Catherine D. Marcum,** and Tara N. Richards

Abstract

THE IMPLEMENTATION of evidence-based practices (EBP) into community corrections has become one of the most important initiatives in the field. Although the early focus was on effective programs for offenders, more recent emphasis has been on the skills needed for probation officers to provide effective supervision. This shift was partially due to a meta-analysis indicating that community supervision, as currently practiced, had virtually no effect on recidivism rates (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008). However, Bonta et al. also noted that many officers were not practicing the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) principles, which is crucial to impacting recidivism rates. Prior meta-analytic reviews of treatment programs (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010) have found that not following RNR principles actually results in an increase in recidivism, while preliminary studies of officers randomly assigned to training in RNR show those offenders supervised by officers who adhere to the RNR model had lower recidivism rates. Given the potential for substantial reductions if the principles are followed, a number of training programs have been developed, including the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS), Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), and Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR).

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A Case Study of the Implementation of Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR)

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THE IMPLEMENTATION of evidence-based practices (EBP) into community corrections has become one of the most important initiatives in the field. Although the early focus was on effective programs for offenders, more recent emphasis has been on the skills needed for probation officers to provide effective supervision. This shift was partially due to a meta-analysis indicating that community supervision, as currently practiced, had virtually no effect on recidivism rates (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008). However, Bonta et al. also noted that many officers were not practicing the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) principles, which is crucial to impacting recidivism rates. Prior meta-analytic reviews of treatment programs (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010) have found that not following RNR principles actually results in an increase in recidivism, while preliminary studies of officers randomly assigned to training in RNR show those offenders supervised by officers who adhere to the RNR model had lower recidivism rates. Given the potential for substantial reductions if the principles are followed, a number of training programs have been developed, including the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS), Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), and Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR). All of these programs aim to teach officers specific skills related to the risk-need-responsivity principles, with a particular emphasis on the use of cognitive-behavioral techniques. However, implementation research in a variety of settings has indicated that formal training alone is not effective in changing professional behavior, and research to date on the implementation of these programs shows similar results (Bonta et al., 2008). Research in other helping professions has noted the need for follow-up support to ensure that skills learned in training result in changes during actual practice (Miller, Yahne, Moyers, Martinez, & Pirritano, 2004; Walters, Matson, Baer, & Ziedonis, 2005).

There is a substantial body of literature on the effectiveness of correction interventions and practices (see McGuire, 2000; Taxman, Shepardson, & Byrne, 2005; White and Graham, 2010) and works that highlight specific *Principles of Correctional Interventions* (National Institute of Corrections, n.d.) as central to evidence-based practices with offenders (see also Crime and Justice Institute, 2009; Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Smith, 2006; Taxman et al., 2005). As noted by Rhine, Mawhorr, & Parks (2006), however, weak implementation can derail an otherwise effective program. The present study describes the strategy utilized by a federal probation district office in the implementation of the STARR training program. The purpose of this study is to highlight one district's efforts to protect program integrity, the challenges faced by those efforts, and the outcomes of those efforts. The hope is that this information will help other federal probation offices improve their own implementation of the STARR program, as well as other criminal justice agencies seeking to implement similar programs or practices.

Implementation Best Practices

Numerous factors contribute to the success or demise of program and policy implementation (see Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005, for a comprehensive review). It is well established that failure to implement a program as originally intended (aka treatment fidelity or program integrity) contributes to the ineffectiveness of many social programs. Research increasingly identifies principles and strategies to increase program integrity (e.g.,

Crime and Justice Institute, 2009; Taxman, Henderson, & Belenko, 2009). The present discussion highlights elements of successful implementation using the drivers/stages model from the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), as described elsewhere (Alexander, 2011). These represent the core attributes used to assess the actual implementation of the STARR program in a federal probation district office.

According to the NIRN model of implementation, the three main drivers for successful implementation include Staff Competency, Organizational Supports, and Leadership. The staging of staff training must be carefully considered, based on existing competencies, willingness, and consideration of those who can "champion" the cause to their peers. Organizational supports include collecting data regarding how implementation is going, removing barriers to implementation, and ensuring that the system as a whole (i.e., judges, attorneys, etc.) is supportive of the implementation efforts. Finally, strong visible leadership, from middle managers to top leaders, is critical. Just being supportive is not enough to safeguard against deviations in the implementation process. Leaders must have the capacity to understand and appreciate the implementation process, as well as possess the leadership skills to navigate potential pitfalls and direct staff members towards success.

Monitoring the progress of the implementation is vital in order to properly assess the various dynamics that may hinder or bolster the success of the process. The mechanism or individual assigned to monitor must be cognizant of the changing states of the various components to the program. For example, a supervisor must be intimately familiar with the stages of implementation and how his staff is responding to the changes. The NIRN model also describes the stages of implementation organizations must go through to ensure effective implementation. They include Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, and Full Implementation. One of the first issues to acknowledge is the amount of time it will take to reach full implementation. Research consistently shows that implementation takes two to four years to complete (Fixsen et al., 2005). In the Exploration stage, management and staff must be given the time and opportunity to fully explore the potential change, talk through issues, and allow staff time to "get ready" for change. During the installation stage, the district should begin preparing for implementation, which includes planning training, anticipating policy changes, setting up measurement tools, and identifying the broader district issues that may need to be addressed. Finally, implementation begins. During the initial implementation, training starts and the expectation begins that officers will actually "do" something different. Full implementation is reached when 50 percent of staff meet performance criteria for a specific skill, and the program or practice has reached scale when 60 percent of the population who could benefit are actually receiving the service (Van Dyke, 2011, personal communication).

The next section will introduce the program under review and discuss the training mechanisms. Because this particular program has been described at length elsewhere (e.g., Lowenkamp, Alexander, & Robinson, 2014; Robinson et al., 2012), the focus will be to highlight the approaches used to facilitate the implementation of STARR in one federal probation district.

The STARR Program and Federal Community Supervision

Rooted in cognitive behavioral therapy, STARR is an evidence-based practice that shapes how federal community supervision officers interact with offenders (Robinson et al., 2012). More specifically, STARR teaches officers how to provide more effective supervision by better understanding offenders' risk factors and decision-making processes, and using that knowledge to enhance how and what they communicate with offenders. Through more constructive and informative interactions, offenders can learn how to make positive decisions and refrain from engaging in future criminal and dysfunctional activities (Hansen, 2008; Lowenkamp, Lowenkamp, & Robinson, 2010; Skeem & Manchuk, 2008). This approach is consistent with the risk-need-responsivity model of correctional interventions (see Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990). Briefly summarized, the principles of the model recommend that the level of services provided should be consistent with an offender's risk level, services should target the specific dynamic risk factors of a particular offender, and services should be delivered in a manner that most is effective for offenders. The service delivery model that is most commonly identified as broadly effective with offender populations is the use of cognitive-behavioral strategies (Andrews, 2006; Hansen, 2008; National Institute of Justice, n.d.; Taxman et al., 2005).

STARR emphasizes the development of several key supervision skills that are to be used during interactions with offenders, including role clarification, effective reinforcement and disapproval, problem-solving, and understanding and teaching the cognitive model. These are evidence-based strategies and practices noted in the literature on the effective supervision of involuntary clients. Many of these skills are built on the principles of cognitive-behavioral interventions and motivational interviewing (e.g., Bourgon, Gutierrez, & Ashton, 2011; Trotter, 2006).

According to the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, as of late 2015, 65 of the 94 federal districts were involved in some level of STARR training and use of the skills. To date, few studies have empirically evaluated the effectiveness of the program. Challenges to quantitative assessments include the maturity of the program, the lack of systematic data collection, and limited resources to conduct rigorous evaluations. However, early studies of STARR indicate that STARR is effective at reducing recidivism (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Alexander, 2014; Robinson, Lowenkamp, Holsinger, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Oleson, 2012; Robinson, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Lowenkamp, 2011) and the reduction may persist over a more significant period of time (Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Alexander, 2014). These suggest that, if properly implemented, STARR can lead to more successful supervision outcomes and long-term desistance among offenders. Additionally, a recent meta-analsyis of training programs aimed at core correctional practices noted a 13 percent lower failure rate for those officers trained in CCPs versus those providing standard supervision (Chadwick, Dewolf, & Serin, 2015). Such results have garnered the attention of community corrections practitioners and researchers and prompted the expansion of STARR throughout the federal probation system.

While STARR is built around core correctional practices and evidence-based strategies, its effectiveness will be significantly impacted by the actual implementation of the program by district offices and individual officers. The following discussion highlights the implementation in one district and assesses this with reference to implementation processes noted previously. Information on the implementation of STARR was obtained by direct observation of STARR training and booster

sessions, conversations with officers and coaches in the district, a survey of district officers, and data provided by the district's chief probation officer (CPO).

Implementation of STARR

The rollout of STARR in the district reviewed actually began with general training for staff on the concepts of evidence-based practices. This step was considered crucial, in order to provide officers and supervisors with a baseline understanding of EBP and help them see "why" STARR was being implemented. Following this training, the CPO issued a request for volunteers to participate in the national training of STARR in Washington, D.C. in late 2010. Two officers volunteered and attended the training. Training of additional officers began in August of 2011 with another small group of volunteers. As the training progressed, the initial two officers, along with two additional officers, were selected to serve as trainers/coaches, based on their demonstrated skill and enthusiasm for the program, and completed additional STARR training. Although the training was initially voluntary, the chief probation officer informed staff that all officers would eventually be required to be trained in STARR, although a specific date for completion was not established. Starting with the third wave of training, specific satellite offices were selected for training based on an informal assessment of readiness and supervisory support. Additional offices were added based on the availability of coaches, with the goal that coaches would not have more than 3-4 new officers to coach at any given time.

The training used numerous types of learning techniques to educate officers about the purpose and goals of STARR and how to apply it across a variety of client interactions. The CPO or selected trainers (also referred to as "coaches") delivered an initial 1-2 day instruction in person in a conference room using PowerPoint presentations, a flipchart, blank cognitive model charts, and video and audio tapes. Training moved beyond mere information delivery, however, by incorporating mock client interactions and role play. Research notes that training which uses directed practice and active participation results in improved implementation by attendees (Crime & Justice Institute, 2009; Lowenkamp, Lowenkamp, & Robinson, 2010; Robinson et al., 2012; Taxman, Henderson, Young, & Farrell, 2012). Comments from the CPO and coaches indicate that the training design also enhanced the office environment by forging a sense of community and trust among the officers. Through role play and immediate feedback in the initial training, the officers became comfortable with asking questions to ensure their understanding of the skill and how to realistically use it. The feedback emphasized the positive aspects of the officer's first attempt at the skill, helping officers gain confidence. This development of initial confidence and comradery continued beyond the training session and seemingly strengthened the officers' commitment to using STARR.

Numerous booster sessions followed the initial training. Each booster focused on one specific previously learned STARR skill to improve understanding and comfort level using the skill when interacting with the client. The first booster occurred approximately one month after the training and boosters occurred approximately each month thereafter. Officers were required to continue monthly boosters until proficiency was reached, as measured by a proficiency rating scale. Once proficient, officers continued booster sessions on a quarterly basis. Officers were trained in waves, based on availability of coaches. To date, officers in the earliest wave have attended on average between 15 and 20 booster sessions, while those in the later waves have attended on average 5-15 sessions. Similar to the initial training, the booster sessions were reported as supportive and encouraged a team dynamic. Interactions between officers and trainers emphasized professional development and the goal of improving supervision strategies and outcomes. During these sessions, trainers reintroduced a particular skill and discussed any challenges/concerns officers had regarding that skill. Examples of recordings of client interactions were shared with the group as learning opportunities to provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the interactions and the use of the skill. The team members were encouraged to provide additional feedback from their experiences and how they overcame various obstacles. Finally, officers would role play the skill in order to obtain immediate feedback. Trainers would then assess whether additional booster sessions and/or techniques were needed to address the skill. For each of the four main STARR skills (effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, teaching the cognitive model, applying the cognitive model), there were generally 3-5 booster sessions provided.

As part of the ongoing training, officers were required to submit audio recordings to their coaches to assess their progress with a particular skill; two tapes per month per officer were required until proficiency was reached, at which time the requirement decreased to two tapes per skill per quarter. The tapes were considered vital to the training because they allowed officers to compare how they thought a conversation had gone to how it actually occurred or how it might be perceived by others.[1] Officers were encouraged to submit all tapes, regardless of quality of the interaction, with an emphasis that they would learn the most from what they considered their "bad" tapes. Each tape was assessed using both coaching and proficiency forms tailored for each skill.[2] Common across the skills were questions regarding the appropriateness of using the skill for that interaction, the strengths of the interactions, and areas for improvement. Also captured was the coach's assessment of the clarity of the skill used, the comfort level of the officer, and how likely it was that the offender understood the officer's comments. Feedback in this manner allowed officers to self-evaluate and to receive constructive feedback from their trainer and peers in a manner that appears to have fostered officer improvement and consistency.

Possibly the most critical element of the training design was the reliance on coaches to conduct the booster sessions and provide feedback for the tapes (see Alexander et al., 2014; also Hertneck, 2013; Taxman et al., 2012). Each officer selected to serve as a coach received additional training specific to coaching and was mentored by an expert trainer. Successful implementation is difficult without strategic follow-up and continued training, which the booster sessions provided (Alexander, 2011; Alexander et al., 2014; Lowenkamp, Lowenkamp, & Robinson, 2010). To facilitate useful monitoring and feedback, coaches were encouraged to maintain a safe learning atmosphere and had to be

[1] There is little doubt that the use of tape recording interactions was initially cumbersome and raised concerns among some officers. However, the CPO was adamant that the recording of the interactions was critical to improving the quality of training and booster sessions as well as communicating to district officers the importance of STARR. Probation offices interested in improving the logistics of audio recording interactions and the data management of recordings, including obtaining offender approval, should contact the authors for more information.

[2] The evaluation form used to assess skill proficiency was developed and pretested through collaboration between the district office and a local university (see Holcomb et al., 2014). Copies of the evaluation form used by the district to assess skill proficiency can be obtained by contacting the authors.

competent in their own skill sets in order to assess the quality of others' efforts (Alexander et al., 2014).

Evidence of STARR Implementation

TABLE 1.

Table 1 notes the timeline for implementation of STARR in the district.

Initial training for first group of volunteers (N=2)	Nov. 2010
Training for second group of volunteers (N = 8)	Aug. 2011
Training for third group (N = 4)	June 2012
Training for final group (N = 7)	June 2013

The following section assesses the implementation of STARR based upon the criteria noted earlier. Discussion notes those aspects of implementation that appear to have been more successful and areas that could be improved and adapted by future training initiatives.

Drivers

As noted earlier, staff and participant support for organizational change is essential for program integrity. A variety of tools are available to assess staff support for organizational change and program integrity (e.g., Crime and Justice Institute, 2009; Institute of Behavioral Research, n.d; Lowenkamp, Lowenkamp, & Robinson, 2010). From the earliest introduction of the program, the vast majority of the officers volunteered for the training. Both the chief and deputy chief probation officer made concerted efforts to communicate the purpose, value, and likely impact of successful implementation of STARR to district staff. Once training was underway and the majority of officers had considerable STARR training, a survey was disseminated to assess the officers' readiness for change. The questionnaire was a modified version of the Organizational Readiness for Change (CJ-DATS 2 BSCO-CO) questionnaire developed by the Institute of Behavioral Research (n.d.). While it is preferable to assess staff readiness for change before implementation, this was not possible in the present circumstances. Nevertheless, survey responses are presented as a meaningful assessment of the district's organizational culture and officers' support for new organizational initiatives and practice, both critical elements for successful implementation of new programs (see Lehman, Greener, & Simpson, 2002; Courtney, Joe, Rowan-Szal, & Simpson, 2007).

The original version of the Organizational Readiness to Change survey had over 100 questions. For a more efficient instrument, questions that were determined not to be critical for the present purpose were eliminated. Furthermore, survey questions were modified to reflect *community* supervision, especially federal probation, rather than the institutional treatment focus of the original survey. Otherwise, the survey is substantively similar to the original version.[3] The survey was administered in an online format to the 12 officers (approximately half of the supervision officers in the district) who had completed substantial STARR training in the district[4] at the time of the survey. All officers completed the survey, for a 100 percent response rate. Discussion of survey results focuses on those questions most closely related to officer perceptions of the necessity, relevance, and value of changes to current officer practice and training intended to improve that practice. These results are presented in Table 2.

First, several questions asked respondents about their perceptions of the need for organizational or officer guidance *before* the implementation of STARR. In other words, did officers believe that there were problems or areas of improvement that STARR was intended to target? Responses to six questions indicate that officers believed that their district needed greater guidance to improve multiple aspects of offender supervision (Likert scale of 1=Disagree Strongly and 5=Agree Strongly; mean=3.77; min=2.5, max=4.5). The specific questions asked about increasing offender participation, improving rapport with offenders, improving offenders' thinking and problem-solving skills, improving behavioral management of offenders, improving cognitive focus of offenders, and identifying and using evidence-based practices. The individual items most concerning for officers were the latter two items (4.09 and 4.45 respectively). It is possible that the timing of the survey may complicate the interpretation of these results. After all, respondents had already undergone significant STARR training and were being asked to think back to organizational and officer practice before STARR training. Furthermore, the training could have influenced how officers remembered circumstances before STARR training. Suggesting that officers would have responded less strongly about the need for improved practice before STARR, however, means that the training increased officer awareness about the importance and need for such training.

A second area targeted in the survey was the perception of officers' own effectiveness and competency in performing their duties. In general, officers indicated that, on average, they were confident in their skill sets and their desire to improve. Seven questions[5] were used to create an index score for self-confidence (1=Disagree Strongly to 5=Agree Strongly; mean 3.94, range 3.14 to 4.86). Again, the timing of the survey may complicate specific interpretations of these results since officers had already been engaged in the training program. It is impossible to control for the impact of STARR training on officer perceptions of their confidence in these skills. If these results are interpreted as independent of training, then these officers had a fairly high degree of confidence in their professional skills before STARR. It is an equally plausible explanation that STARR training was partially responsible for the relatively high perceptions of professional competence. To assess willingness to seek self-improvement, five independent

[3] The version of the ORC survey that was used in the present study (9CJ-DATS 2 BSCO-CO) has recently been revised and is available as the TCU ORC D4 version at http://ibr.tcu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ORC-D4-Rev-Aug09.pdf. The authors wish to thank Kevin Knight at IBR for his assistance with information and assistance in our revisions.

[4] One of the original purposes of the survey was to examine the relationship between responses on the survey and actual use of STARR skills. This would have provided additional information on the factors related to officer implementation of STARR. Unfortunately, personnel changes following the administration of the survey greatly minimized the value of the survey for such purposes. The results are presented as evidence of attitudes of officers trained in STARR towards organizational change and evidence-based practices, which can have a direct impact on successful implementation.

[5] Self-confidence measures included: 1) you feel you have the skills needed to get your offenders to discuss their progress with you; 2) other officers often ask your advice about district procedures; 3) learning and using new procedures is easy for you; 4) you are considered an experienced source of advice about supervision services; 5) you feel appreciated for the job you do at work; 6) you are effective and confident doing your job; and 7) you are able to adapt quickly when you have to make changes.

TABLE 2.

Survey Measures and Questions	Min/Max Range	Avgerage Hours Per Month
Need for Guidance Prior to Implementation (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)	**2.5/4.5**	**3.77**
Increasing participation by offenders in services	2/5	3
Improving rapport with offenders	2/5	3.45
Improving offenders' thinking and problem solving skills	2/5	3.82
Improving behavior management of offenders	2/5	3.82
Improving cognitive focus of offenders during sessions	2/5	4.09
Identifying and using evidence-based practices	3/5	4.45
Self Confidence (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)	**3.14/4.86**	**3.94**
You Have the skills needed to get offenders to discuss their progress with you	4/5	4.33
Other officers ask your advice about district procedures	1/5	3.58
Learning and using new procedures is easy for you	2/5	3.83
You are considered an experienced source about supervision services	2/5	3.67
You feel appreciated for the job you do at work	2/5	4
You are effective and confident doing your job	3/5	4.08
You are able to adapt quickly when you have to make changes	3/5	4.08
Self Improvement (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)	**3/4.8**	**3.67**
Regularly read professional articles and books on supervision	2/5	3.17
Review new techniques and case supervision information regularly	2/4	3.5
Willing to try new ideas even if some officers are reluctant	4/5	4.33
Frequently share knowledge of new offender supervision ideas with others	2/5	3.33
Do a good job of regularly updating and improving your skills	3/5	4.0
Supervisor Encouragement (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)	**2.67/5**	**4.11**
Encourages new ways of looking at how we do our jobs	3/5	4.08
Gives special recognition to others' work when it is very good	2/5	4.08
Emphasizes using new ideas, services, techniques etc. before most other districts	3/5	4.17
Resistance to EBP (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)	**NA**	**NA**
Research-based treatments/interventions are **not** useful practice	1/3	2.18
Would **not** use interventions/techniques in which you had to follow guidelines	1/3	2.18
Stress (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)	**NA**	**NA**
Officers at your district often show signs of high stress or strain	4/5	4.42
Officer frustration is common where you work	2/5	3.5
Officers are able to spend the time needed with offenders	1/5	2.75
Your district has enough supervision officers to meet current offender needs	1/5	1.92
More officers are needed to help meet needs at your district	2/5	4.42
Heavier workload reduces the effectiveness of your district	4/5	4.5

questions[6] were used due to different coding conventions. Of the five measures related to self-improvement, the lowest average response was 3.17 (regularly read professional articles and books), and the two highest were 4.0 (good job of regularly updating and improving skills) and 4.33 (willing to try new ideas).

Officers were also asked directly about their level of resistance to organizational change such as implementing evidence-based practices. Two measures were particularly informative for officer resistance. When asked the degree to which officers agreed with a) whether research-based treatments or interventions were not useful practice, and b) if they would not use interventions or techniques that had to follow instructions or guidelines (1=Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree), the results showed that the officers reported considerable disagreement with both statements (mean = 2.18 for both).[7] This indicates that officers saw value in evidence-based practices and were receptive to incorporating this in their own practice. This minimizes the likelihood that their participation in STARR training was merely perfunctory. Coupled with the above findings, the officers in this district seemed ready, willing, and confident in their abilities to learn new approaches.

As noted previously, organizational support and commitment are essential for successful implementation (Alexander, 2011; Taxman, Henderson, & Belenko, 2009; Lehman et al., 2002; Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005). One of the most critical aspects of organizational change is the role and attitude of a participant's direct supervisor. Several survey questions focused on the role of the supervisor in encouraging new approaches in effective practice and the officer's resistance towards evidence-based practices or following specific guidelines in general. Three measures were combined to create an index score for supervisor encouragement. The questions asked about the supervisor's willingness to consider new ideas and strategies, recognition of staff success, and the supervisor's willingness to consider new ideas and practices before other districts. Results presented in Table 2 indicate that officers generally agreed with each of these statements (overall average of 4.11). Thus, officers appear to view their supervisors as supportive of new practices and officer success, both critical to the implementation of evidence-based strategies and practices.

The final area of organizational culture that the survey was used to measure was officer perceptions of district resources and officer stress. Extreme responses to questions in these areas could suggest barriers to the implementation of new practices. Extreme shortages in personnel may result in overburdened officers who are unable or unwilling to dedicate the time to developing new skills or tactics. It is also possible that such environments can create the perceived need for more effective and efficient means of supervising offenders and, therefore, create an opportunity to legitimize organizational change. Research indicates that caseload size is not independently associated with the use of evidence-based practices, but that organizational culture and support are critical to that relationship (Jalbert et al., 2011). Officers at the present district did report relatively high levels of stress and workload.[8] All officers agreed or strongly agreed that officers showed signs of high stress and strain (mean=4.42), but were less certain that frustration is commonplace across officers (mean=3.50). One source of potential stress was that officers generally disagreed with the statement that they were able to spend the time needed with offenders (mean = 2.75). They also disagreed that the district had enough officers to meet current offender needs (mean = 1.92). Furthermore, officers agreed that more officers were needed to help meet needs (mean = 4.42) and that heavy officer workload reduces the effectiveness of the district (mean = 4.50). It is nearly universal that community corrections professionals believe caseloads are too high. Furthermore, community correctional agencies reportedly receive insufficient funding to perform their (frequently increasing) responsibilities. Results indicate that the present district is not especially unique in perceptions about the lack of resources to supervise offenders. The finding that officers believe there is insufficient time to work with offenders is especially relevant for STARR training, because one of the intended purposes of developing STARR skills is to help officers use their time interacting with offenders more effectively. Recent literature suggests that officers can affect positive change with as little as 20 minutes, if those interactions use core correctional practices and evidence-based strategies (Lowenkamp et al., 2104; Lowenkamp, Lowenkamp, & Robinson; Trotter, 2006).

Overall, the highlighted results from the survey demonstrated that the officers in this district were ready to change. They felt overworked and not able to spend adequate time with the offenders, but were receptive to new and innovative ideas, felt supported by their supervisor, were confident in their own skill sets, and for the purposes of staff buy-in, were open to learn new and better approaches. It is possible that because the survey was disseminated after the training was underway, some of these measures could have been influenced by the training and coaching, particularly with a sample of one district office; however, there appears to have been little meaningful resistance among those who had already been trained. Furthermore, the district office culture, especially as it relates to a supervisory role in implementing organizational change, appears to have been receptive to new training and officer strategies.

Sustaining Initial Implementation and Reaching Full Implementation

Successful implementation is a long road, generally taking 2-5 years to complete. It is well-documented that criminal justice reform is frequently short-lived and modified before any meaningful change can be expected to take place (Lab, 2004). To minimize such decay, research notes the importance of subsequent training to maintain and improve program integrity (Alexander, 2011; Taxman et al., 2012). Providing continual officer support was a central element of the implementation strategy for STARR. After the initial training, the first booster session was held approximately a month later. As noted previously, these sessions occurred approximately once a month and continue even at this time of publication, five years after initial training began. Such long-term commitment to an implementation

[6] Self-improvement measures include: 1) You regularly read professional articles and books on supervision of correction offenders, 2) you review new techniques and case supervision information regularly, 3) you are willing to try new ideas even if some officers are reluctant, 4) you frequently share your knowledge of new offender supervision ideas with others, and 5) you do a good job of regularly updating and improving your skills.

[7] Questions were asked in the negative to avoid the problem of agreement bias and repetitive format.

[8] It should be noted that the survey was administered in mid-November 2013. This was approximately four weeks after the conclusion of a two-week federal government shutdown, which may have contributed to higher level of staff stress. The survey was to be originally released in September 2013, but when a possible shutdown was being discussed in the news media, it was decided to postpone the administration of the survey. Researchers spoke with the district CPO before submitting the survey to ensure that office operations and the office environment had returned to normal. Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine what, if any, effect the proximity of the survey to the shutdown had on officer responses.

process is a cornerstone of ensuring that changes in practice become permanent. The sustainment of the use of STARR is evident in the percentage of contacts that include at least one STARR skill, as shown in Chart 1. Even with new officers being added each year, for which STARR skill use will be limited due to the newness of the skill, the yearly averages for skill use increased and now represent at least half of all contacts.

Feedback

Multiple mechanisms for feedback were incorporated in the STARR training, including both group and individual feedback by peers, coaches, and supervisors. Conversations with district officers indicated that this feedback led to officers feeling more confident in their skills and improved their proficiency. The coaches themselves were carefully selected by the CPO due to their leadership and performance skills. As noted earlier, each coach received specialized training in how to be an effective STARR coach. They were also mentored by an expert STARR trainer before and throughout officer training. Thus, the district provided opportunities for feedback to both officers and the coaches who worked with officers.

For the officers, the coaches provided constructive criticism and suggestions targeting several different areas. Built into the curriculum of the initial training and boosters were role play and critical assessments of audio recordings. In booster sessions, coaches gave immediate feedback, peers could ask questions and offer helpful suggestions, and officers were able to learn from feedback given not only to themselves but to their co-workers. Officers also submitted tapes of client interactions on a regular basis. The coaches used a standardized form to evaluate tapes, but also had the freedom to add their critiques or suggestions that were in addition to the items on the evaluation form.[9] Finally, coaches made a concerted effort to be available to the officer (by phone, email, or in person) on a regular basis, which helped to foster a strong teaching environment. Overall, the officers believed the coaching they received was invaluable (see Alexander et al., 2014).

Evaluation

The final component to assessing STARR implementation is an evaluation of officer skill competency and the frequency of their use of STARR strategies with offenders. Research notes the importance of having an evaluation plan in place before the start of the program implementation (Alexander, 2011; Crime & Justice Institute, 2009). As noted previously, full implementation is considered reached once 50 percent of staff meet performance criteria for a specific skill.

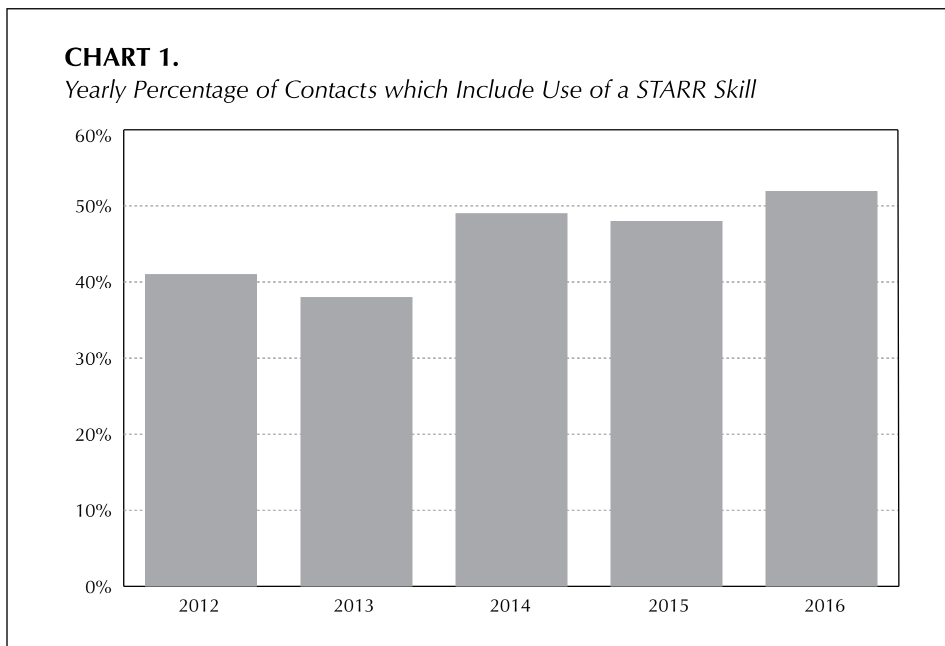
Similar to the design of the feedback component of STARR, measures of STARR skills were carefully crafted. The initial proficiency evaluation form was created by the district coaches and the CPO, who was one of the STARR developers. To improve the validity and reliability of the instrument, researchers at a regional university conducted an external review of the instrument (see Clodfelter, Alexander, Holcomb, Marcum, & Richards, 2014), and the instrument went through numerous revisions before being finalized. The initial group of officers trained were rated on proficiency by the researchers and students, who evaluated 2 audio tapes per skill per officer to determine if the officers were competent on the skill. For each skill, this totaled roughly 24 tapes that each of the approximately 20 coders analyzed. Detailed results were provided to the district CPO (see Holcomb, Marcum, Richards, Clodfelter, & Alexander, 2014), and these results were shared with coaches and officers to improve feedback and further training. Nearly all of the officers who underwent initial training were able to demonstrate a high level of proficiency with STARR skills in the first round of coding. Since the initial evaluation, the district has continued to use the proficiency rating scale for both the original officers and all officers trained in subsequent waves. Once deemed proficient, officers must demonstrate continued proficiency through submission of quarterly audiotapes; if they do not maintain proficiency, booster sessions are reinstated. To date, approximately 75 percent of officers have reached proficiency.

In addition to assessing the quality of interactions, the district tracks the frequency of skill usage in order to assess the scale of the intervention. Although no specific standards have been researched regarding what may constituent "sufficient" STARR skill intervention, the district has set a goal of 40-60 percent of all client interactions including a STARR skill. A monthly report of STARR skill use is distributed to coaches and supervisors, who then follow up with officers regarding their skill use. The district communicates specific expectations for skill usage during the training process. Newly trained officers have a low expectation (5 percent of interactions) to try to ensure that officers are motivated to attempt the newly learned skills, rather than be discouraged by an unattainable goal. As officers progress through training, the frequency of skill usage is increased. STARR skill usage is reviewed regularly by the CPO, coaches, and individual officers to increase the likelihood that officers are actually using STARR skills when appropriate. Data for the 2015 calendar year notes that, on average, officers trained in the STARR skills were using the skills in 46.8 percent of interactions, with a range of monthly use from 12 percent

[9] The evaluation instrument is available from the authors.

CHART 1.

Yearly Percentage of Contacts which Include Use of a STARR Skill



(generally at the beginning of officer training) to 92 percent for the most seasoned officer (one of the initial volunteers trained in 2011). Furthermore, STARR training appears to have become part of the organizational culture, as STARR skills are included as part of the hiring process and are part of the performance evaluation. All of these elements suggest that the use of STARR skills have become essential to successful supervision rather than a temporary program or tactic to be merely tolerated.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Although numerous aspects of the execution of STARR training were deemed successful, several areas of improvement were recognized by researchers and district staff. The first important challenge was estimating the increased workload on the coaches and how it would affect their ability to manage their numerous responsibilities. It was expected that the feedback and evaluation strategies would be comprehensive, but it was not anticipated how cumbersome it would be to balance their new STARR responsibilities with existing job requirements. We recommend that supervisors carefully select coaches with excellent time management skills and take steps to redistribute or modify coaches' non-STARR responsibilities to provide them with sufficient time to perform their critical function in implementing STARR.

It was also determined that, while the training and coaching of STARR skills were well defined and articulated, the *global skills* emphasized in training were more challenging. Global skills are consistent with core correctional practices and reflect attitudinal and relational characteristics of interactions such as empathy, collaboration, and autonomy, which have been found to be critical elements of successful interventions with involuntary clients (see Clark, 2005; Trotter, 2006; Walters, Clark, Gingerich, & Meltzer, 2007). These concepts are more abstract and difficult to define and, therefore, harder to provide feedback and evaluation. While the instrument revision process included measures on these global skills, coaches occasionally found it difficult to evaluate interactions on these measures. As a result, the district's STARR team has continued to refine the proficiency instruments for the global skills.

Rhine et al. (2006) argued that the failure of evidence-based practices to show effective change in corrections was not due to the lack of knowledge of behaviors and expected outcomes within particular frameworks, but rather caused by the inability to implement the programs or policies in a manner that would sustain change over time. In particular, they challenged that without proper training, monitoring, and supervision of program integrity, implementation of criminal justice reform is likely to fail. Thus, ensuring that a program is implemented as intended is a prerequisite to any further assessment of the program's effectiveness.

The purpose of the present study was to describe the implementation of STARR in one federal district and determine whether an outcome evaluation was warranted. After all, if officers were not adequately trained in STARR or using those skills in their actual supervision practice, then it would not be prudent to examine the relationship between STARR and offender outcomes. Navigating district officers through the implementation process was a key component of the implementation design of STARR in this district. In fact, the CPO and coaches consider it essential to officer support and participation, which enhanced program integrity and prevented decay since the officers were invested. While the team felt that some proficiency instruments needed further revision, the CPO, coaches, and research team went to great lengths to produce an assessment tool that would be useful for a wider audience of STARR trainers and supervisors.

Currently, all locations in the district are trained and appear to be actively using STARR. This level of engagement is in part due to the documented early success of STARR (see Robinson et al., 2012). But perhaps more importantly, the implementation of STARR was strongly supported by both the upper and middle management of the district. Often in bureaucratic agencies, ideas of best practices are informally implemented and difficult to sustain. In this context, supervisors may be resistant to improve officer practice consistent with existing evidence. It appears that the role and support of the CPO in this particular district garnered support and buy-in from the officers, which aided in the implementation process. STARR utilization is now included as part of the officer's annual review, further demonstrating how STARR has become an integral part of the culture in this district.

The remaining question is whether STARR is associated with improved offender outcomes. As noted previously, such an investigation was not warranted until it was determined that officers were sufficiently trained in STARR and were using it in their everyday supervision activities. The present study indicates that, at least in the district under review, STARR has been implemented sufficiently for future analysis. Now that a sufficient period of time has passed since the implementation of STARR, it is possible to conduct outcome analyses on a variety of offender outcomes. Such a study is currently underway. Researchers and probation administrators seeking to determine the impact of STARR or similar programs are encouraged to first determine if the program has been fully implemented in a manner consistent with its original design. Without such information, any evaluation will be of limited value. Hopefully, the present study provides insight into important questions and means of assessing implementation for community correctional agencies.

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