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# Fidelity in Focus: Indiana's Commitment to Evidence-Based Practices and Reducing Recidivism

by CSRC

Practice in Action 

By Zerline Hughes Spruill, contributing writer

After 30 years of research and progress in the field, community supervision agencies are well-versed in evidence-based practices (EBP). What is often overlooked or more difficult to do, however, is ensuring the fidelity of those practices—not just using them, but using them *effectively*—to have the greatest impact on reducing recidivism.

In 2020, the Indiana Department of Correction (DOC) embarked on a journey to do just that: administer the Correctional Program Checklist for Community Supervision Agencies (CPC-CSA) to do its part in turning the state's recidivism rate on its head.

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## CPC-CSA: A Blueprint for Strengthening Community Supervision



Visit the [UCCI CPC webpage](#) for their tools, overviews, and more.

The CPC-CSA is a research-informed tool developed by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI) that helps community supervision agencies strengthen their recidivism reduction practices. By assessing an agency's current level of adherence to EBP, the CPC-CSA establishes a baseline that can guide the development of targeted training, coaching, and technical assistance plans.

The CPC-CSA is based on four principles of effective intervention—risk, need, responsivity, and fidelity—and includes five domains that measure the capacity of community supervision agencies to deliver evidence-based



**An overview of the CPC-CSA was given at the Community Supervision Resource Center launch in Arlington, VA, in September 2024.**

interventions and services to people with justice system involvement and the content of their practices: (1) Leadership, Agency Management and Support, (2) Staff, (3) Quality Assurance, (4) Offender Assessment, and (5) Evidence-Based Practices.

“We can assess how correctional agencies adhere to these core principles,” said UCCI Research Associate Eric Willoughby, who leads the CPC assessment process in collaboration with the Indiana DOC. “It gives us the opportunity to assist agencies in developing and improving services for the population that is justice-involved. It’s a way for us to pop the hood on correctional agencies to see how they are doing. It gives us a blueprint of where they are, what they are doing well, and what elements will help them grow.”

“To me, what Indiana has decided to do with adopting the CPC-CSA is double down on the value of data-driven decision-making,” said Dr. Myrinda Schweitzer, executive director of UCCI. “They are showing their communities that they are investing in them, committing to strong service delivery, and making sure they are helping as many people as they can that come through their doors.”



**Eric Willoughby,  
Research Associate,  
UCCI**



**Myrinda Schweitzer,  
Executive Director,  
UCCI**

**Indiana Department of Correction Leans on, Learns from the CPC-CSA**

With funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the Indiana DOC partnered with UCCI to evaluate the fidelity of the state's community corrections programs to evidence-based recidivism reduction practices. These programs provide sentencing alternatives (in lieu of incarceration) for people convicted of felonies, serve as an intermediate response to help people comply with their supervision expectations, and offer reentry services for those transitioning into the community.

To administer the CPC-CSA, the Indiana DOC and UCCI visited 76 community corrections programs across the state over an 18-month period. Calls were conducted before site visits, consisting of client and staff interviews, observation of groups and programs, and a review of program materials and files. The teams of assessors came back together to score each domain for every program based on collected materials and interviews and prepared a detailed report of the assessment results. The report included free- or low-cost improvement recommendations.

In addition to administering the CPC-CSA, the Indiana DOC doubled its efforts to support all 76 community corrections programs by contracting with UCCI to provide follow-up training and technical assistance. Program supervisors and staff are being offered e-learning opportunities to build their knowledge of EBP, and on- and off-site technical assistance is being provided to develop action plans, check on implementation results, and coach supervisors and staff to enhance services and better support the people they serve. Furthermore, UCCI is offering "train the trainer" opportunities focused on foundational correctional practices.



**Angela Estes,  
Assistant Director,  
Community Services  
Division, Indiana DOC**

"It's not enough to provide training, walk away, and expect things to go perfectly when staff return to their day-to-day responsibilities. It's important that we help agencies implement EBP in the real world. Unfortunately, most new initiatives fail, so we want to find ways to prevent that from happening," said Angela Estes, assistant director for the Indiana DOC's Community Corrections Division. "This process provides a roadmap for agencies to increase their adherence to evidence-based practices. It gives a snapshot of the agency's strengths and opportunities for improvement with some examples to improve their adherence, which is really nice. We can then take those results and dive into action planning to help them make those enhancements. Allowing for this collaborative approach is the real value of the CPC."

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## Angela Estes

### Scoring, Data Collection, and Vulnerability

The mission of Boone County Community Corrections in central Indiana is to enhance public safety by offering a cost-effective, community-based alternative to incarceration. They achieve this by providing intensive supervision, conducting effective evaluations, and implementing evidence-based programs to encourage adult and juvenile clients to become positive members of the community. Standing by its mission to incorporate evidence-based programming to inspire clients, its director, Michael D. Nance, said the CPC-CSA was welcome.

"I've been with the County for 17 years and director for eight to nine years and have been through a handful of audits," said Nance. "Instead of hearing that we need to post our mission statement in the waiting room, which doesn't really help, this one was the most valuable to me. I felt like it was more truly an assessment than an audit. They provided feedback for applicable tools that would benefit our clients."

"This was much more geared to evidence-based practices, asking if we are meeting clients at their level, using risk management and case assessment tools," continued Nance. "They told us, 'Here's where you're meeting marks, and here's where research shows you could do better.' I didn't feel like we would be punished or downgraded at the end."



**Angela Estes presented at the launch event in September 2024 on behalf of the Indiana Department of Correction's Community Corrections Division.**

In any situation, such as a student taking a final exam, a taxpayer getting audited, or a government agency being scrutinized, a point-based evaluation system can become a stressful and unwelcome process. Agencies are used to getting 99 percent on assessments, and when the CPC-CSA scores come up at less than 5 percent, for example, there are instances of nervousness and feeling subpar, according to UCCI.

"It's hard and scary for anyone to be judged," said Estes. "Part of this tool, the way it was designed, is that you're comparing [agencies] to the perfect program, which we know doesn't exist. The scores tend to be incredibly low, but it's not an audit—it's a measure of adherence to research-driven principles. An agency director would be terrified of what a low score means; stakeholders would ask, 'Why is the DOC providing an agency money if they're scoring 20 percent?' It's not about the score. It's about the areas of strength and areas for improvement."

"The CPC-CSA can provide a roadmap to increase adherence to the principles of effective intervention, she continued. "We had to make sure people understand what it is we're doing, and we wanted everyone to focus on the report's content—not the scores—so we decided to take the scores out. It seemed like a no-brainer once we thought about it. We want the agencies to know we're trying to help; we want them to get better."

Tyler Hunt, director of Blackford County Community Corrections in east central Indiana, said his staff were nervous when they first learned about the CPC-CSA, but during the evaluation, they enjoyed being part of the process.

"I think it's super important to be open to it; it's really not that bad," said Hunt. "I found it pretty exciting. For a small county, it's exciting for someone to come in and tell us what we're doing good, not as good, and where there is an opportunity to grow. You've got to know the data to continue to build on your future. I needed that measurement so we could continue going forward. You do see the changes you can make in your community with this."

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## **Tyler Hunt**

### **Living by Example, Becoming the Example**

"The CPC is being used across the nation. Is it in every state? No. Is it in every county? No. As the field continues to evolve, such as through opportunities like BJA's Justice Reinvestment Initiative or Innovations in Supervision Initiative, corrections agencies are much more interested in understanding the quality of their practices today," said Schweitzer.

"The CPC has been around for a couple of decades, and some statewide agencies use some version of it," she added, referring to the CPC-GA (Group Assessment) and the CPC-DC (Drug Courts). "Sometimes it's their community-based program; sometimes it's the institution. They assess their programs regularly, they get a baseline, develop an action plan, and a couple of years later, they measure growth and progress."

Indiana is one state that can serve as a best practice model for implementing effective, evidence-based community supervision. By strengthening its fidelity-based approach, the state aims to further support residents while awaiting the latest recidivism rates following the 76 completed assessments.

### **Twists, Curves, and Adjustments**

According to researchers and the correctional programs themselves, the CPC-CSA is answering the need for Indiana. By conducting program evaluations using tools like the CPC-CSA, researchers can better understand how a program is implemented and assess its impact on outcomes.

"The CPC gives you an inside look at what's happening in an agency, which helps you understand outcome measures," Schweitzer shared. "It's one assessment protocol that can help shed some light on the *why*. It's not the only thing I would use; it's designed to be used with other data sources when making decisions."

Nonetheless, in many cases, an agency's capacity to administer the CPC is a challenge. As such, Estes said more is needed to ensure that her agency is prepared to readminister the assessment (every three to five years is recommended) to help staff and community supervision clients on an ongoing basis.

"We're not perfect by any stretch," said Estes. "One area that we struggle with is having the capacity to conduct the CPC-CSA. Having not just the practitioners but practitioners with a little bit of that research background helps with

conducting these assessments. Writing 20 to 25 pages in a report and crafting individualized recommendations rooted in EBP can also be taxing, especially if that's not been something staff have done in their career often."

According to researchers, the key to having a strong impact is sticking with the evaluation process, adhering to the recommendations, and being as transparent as possible throughout the interagency collaboration.

"We don't want this to be something we do one time and then go on to the next thing. We want to continue to use this assessment and want it to be a useful tool for the agency," said Estes.

Willoughby added: "At UCCI, we look at how we translate research into everyday use to know that the services provided to people with justice system involvement are useful. We're letting corrections staff know what they're doing is helping the people they've been working with."

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### **About the Author**

Zerline Hughes Spruill writes about justice and has been published in *USA Today*, *Ebony*, and the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange.