

# Moving Community Supervision Forward: Implementation of Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)

Cara Thompson, ABD  
Corrections Institute  
University of Cincinnati

&

Sara Shields  
Franklin County, OH  
Franklin County Adult Probation

# Session Objectives

- Review the research on RNR models of community supervision
- Identify the four components of the EPICS model and key skills learned during the training
- Develop an understanding of the EPICS training and coaching process
- Identify common agency barriers to implementing the EPICS model
- Learn key processes related to successful implementation of EPICS within an agency

# Section 1

Effectiveness of RNR Models of Community  
Supervision

# Traditional Community Supervision

- Community supervision is one of the most widely used sanctions in the criminal justice system
- Historically, community supervision was seen as positive because it minimized the criminogenic effects of prison and promoted the community integration of offenders (Abadinsky 2009; Gibbons and Rosecrance 2005)
- However, a growing body of research illustrates that community supervision *alone* has been ineffective in reducing recidivism (e.g., Petersilia and Turner 1993; MacKenzie 1997; Bonta et al., 2008)

# Traditional Community Supervision

- Why has community supervision not shown reductions in recidivism?
  - Bonta et al. (2008) explored the potential reasons that community supervision has been shown to be ineffective in reducing recidivism
  - The authors found that officers rarely adhered to the principles of effective intervention during contact sessions
  - Instead of focusing on risk, need, and responsivity factors, officers spent most of their contact sessions on compliance with conditions and the law enforcement aspects of their job

# Principles of Effective Intervention

- Prior research has demonstrated that correctional services can be effective in reducing recidivism...but not all services are equally effective!
- The most effective services are based on the **principles of effective intervention.**

# Principles of Effective Intervention

## RISK

### WHO

Deliver more intense intervention to higher risk offenders

## NEED

### WHAT

Target criminogenic needs to reduce risk for recidivism

## RESPONSIVITY

### HOW

Use CBT approaches  
Match mode/style of service to offender

# Translating the RNR Framework to Community Supervision

- *Adhere to the **principles of effective intervention**:*
  - Assess risk and need levels
  - Target moderate and high risk offenders
  - Target criminogenic needs
  - Use cognitive behavioral interventions
- *Use **core correctional practices**:*
  - Quality collaborative relationship
  - Reinforcement, Disapproval, Use of Authority
  - Cognitive restructuring
  - Structured skill building
  - Problem solving skills



# Translating the RNR Framework In Community Supervision

## THE WORK OF CHRIS TROTTER

- The use of certain skills by probation staff is related to reductions in recidivism:
  - Developing collaborative relationships
  - Role clarification
  - Targeting criminogenic needs
  - Reinforcing prosocial behavior
  - Prosocial modeling
  - Problem solving

Trotter, C. (1996, 2006).

# Translating the RNR Framework In Community Supervision

## STICS RESEARCH

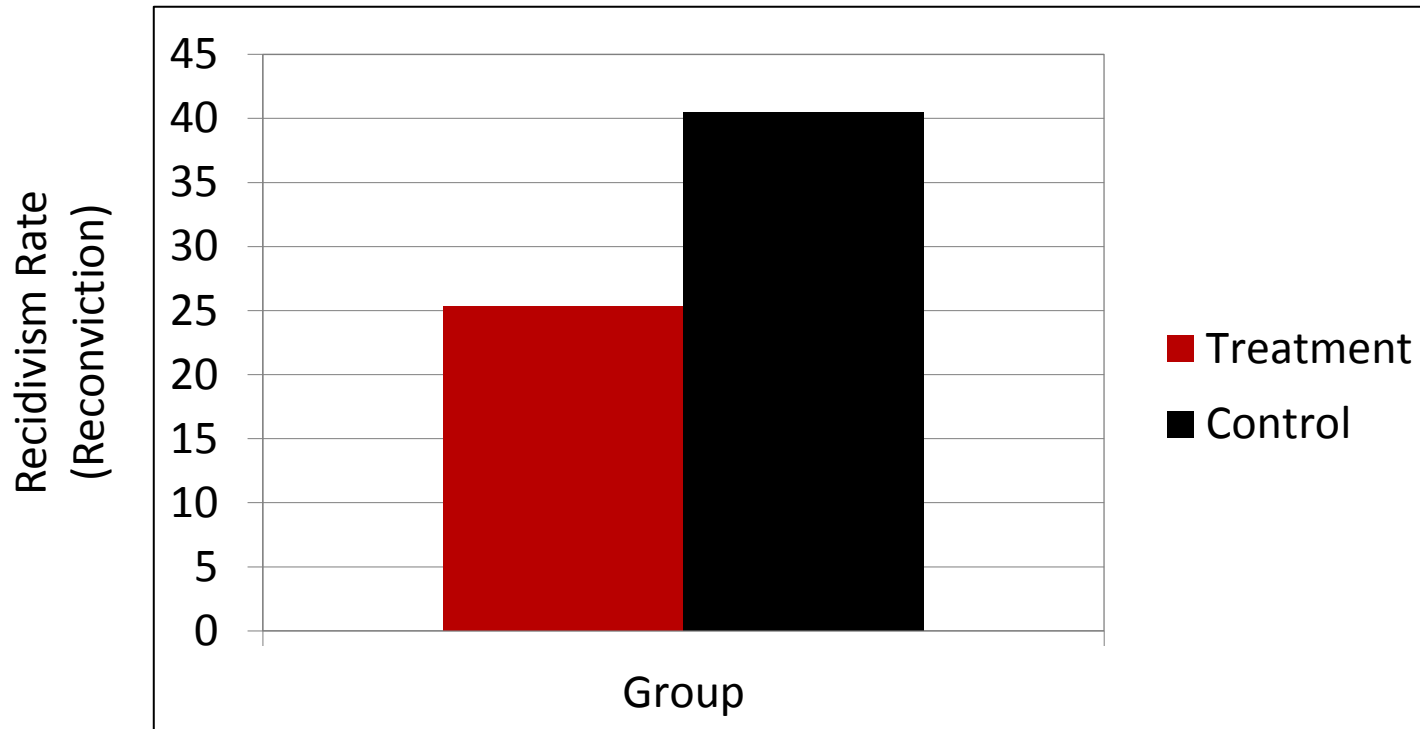
- Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS)
- Results indicated that trained participants had 12% higher retention rates than untrained participants at six months

Bourgon et al. (2010)

Bonta et al. (2010)

# Translating the RNR Framework In Community Supervision

## STICS RESEARCH



Bonta et al. (2010)

# EPICS Research

## EPICS PILOT STUDY

- Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)
- Results indicated that staff trained in the EPICS model demonstrated more consistent use of core correctional practices
- Trained staff also became more proficient in their use of the skills over time as a result of participation in additional practice sessions

Smith et al. (2012)

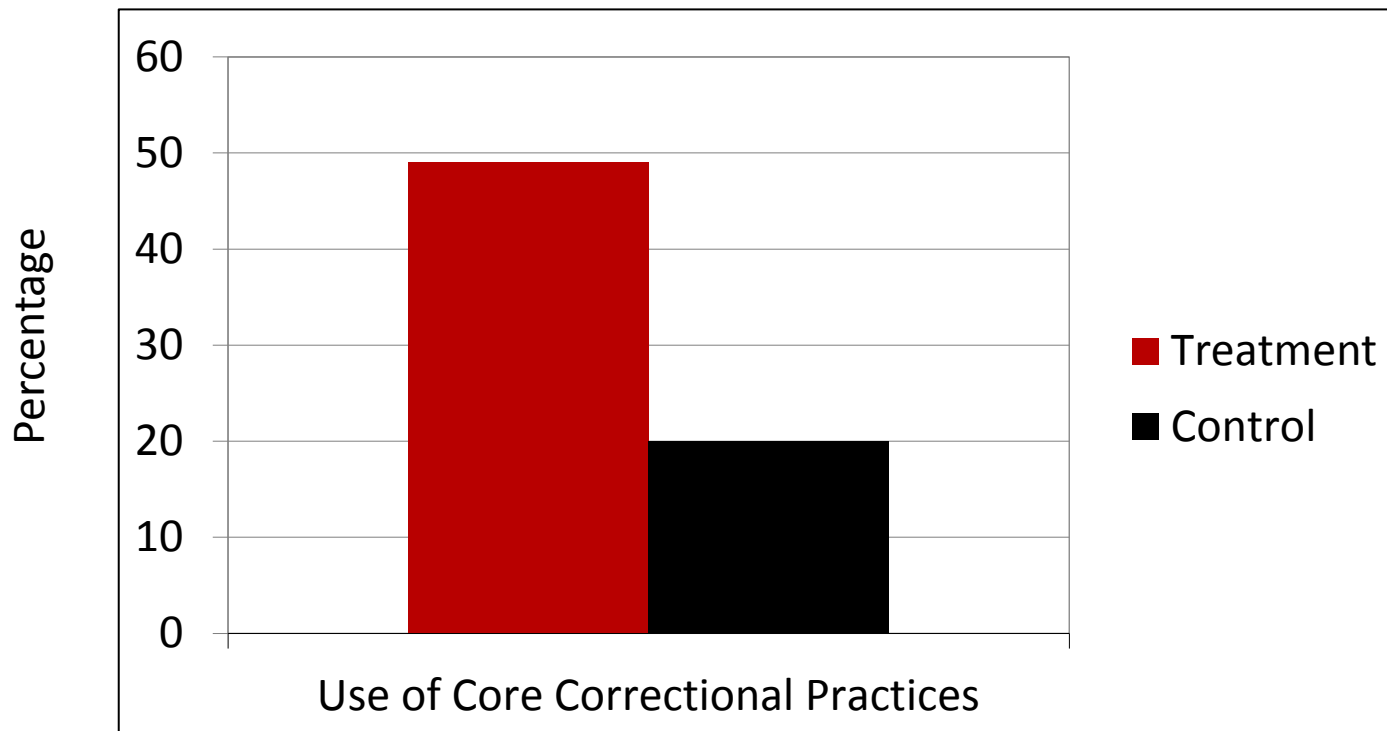
# EPICS Research

## EPICS RESEARCH

- Evaluation of EPICS in Ohio
- Involved 21 trained and 20 untrained staff and 272 offenders
- Staff trained in EPICS outperformed untrained staff in the use of core correctional practices during contact sessions
- High risk offenders assigned to high fidelity staff had significantly lower incarceration rates than high risk offenders assigned to low fidelity staff

# EPICS Research

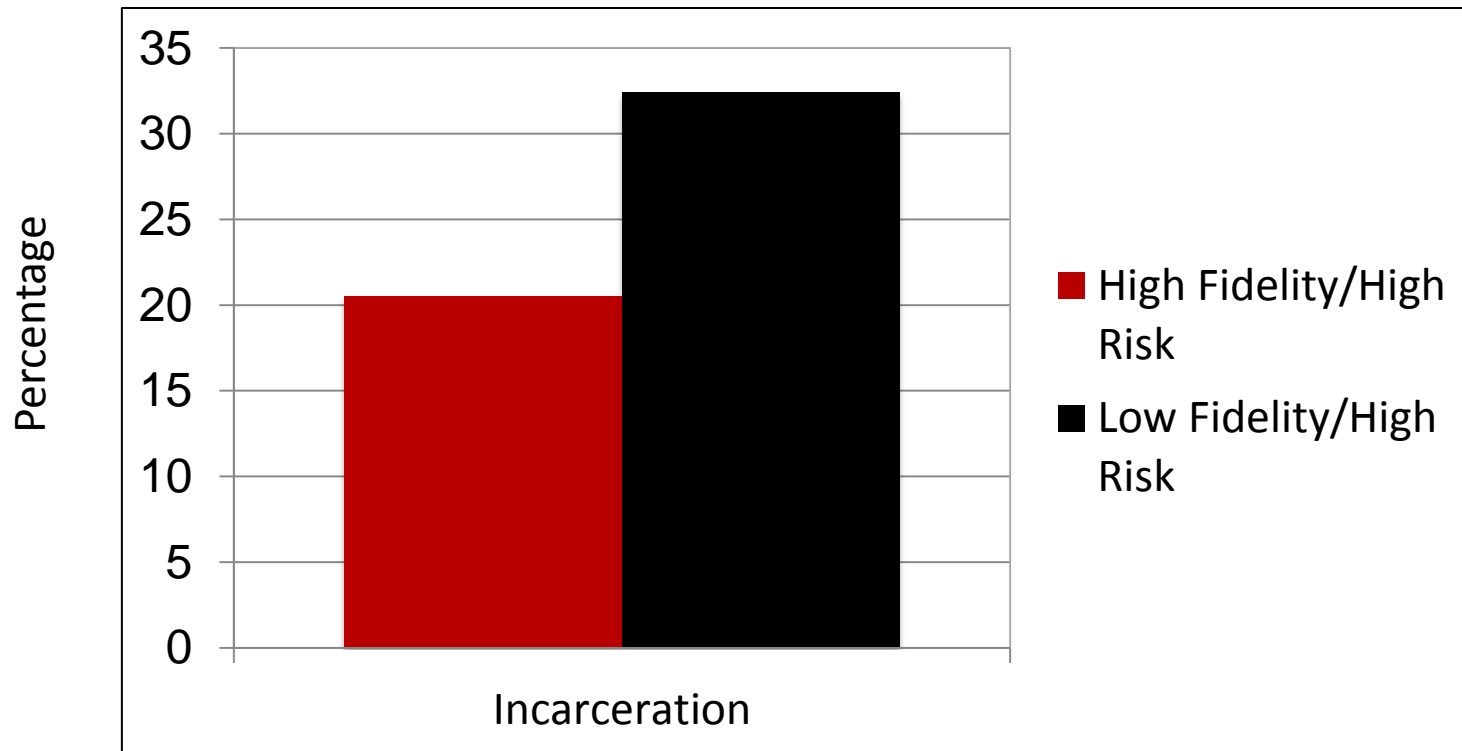
## EPICS RESEARCH



Latessa et al. (2013)

# EPICS Research

## EPICS RESEARCH



Latessa et al. (2013)

# EPICS Research

## EPICS IMPACT ON ANTISOCIAL THINKING

- Recent research has shown that the EPICS model is an effective means to reduce the antisocial thinking patterns of offenders supervised by officers trained in the model



# EPICS Research

## EPICS INFLUENCE ON RELATIONSHIPS

- Probation staff trained in EPICS who had high fidelity to the model were significantly more likely to be perceived as trustworthy by the offenders on their caseload
- The study found that as trust increased between the offender and the officer, the odds of being re-arrested are lowered

# Franklin Co.'s Reaction to the Research

- Recognized the importance of a dynamic risk/need assessment tool
- Raised internal awareness:
  - Too much emphasis on conditions of supervision
  - Not enough focus on using results of assessment to target higher risk offenders' criminogenic needs
- Identified a need for a structured model to increase awareness to RNR framework
  - Adopted EPICS!

# Section 2

EPICS Model and Core Skills

# Purpose of the EPICS Model

- This model strives to more fully utilize staff as agents of change and ensure offenders receive a consistent message throughout the continuum of correctional services
- The EPICS model is not intended to replace more intense cognitive-behavioral treatments that address specific criminogenic needs

# Objectives of the EPICS Model

- Apply the RNR framework to community supervision
  - Focuses effort on moderate to high risk offenders
  - Provides a format to target criminogenic needs in a one-on-one context
  - Encourages identification of specific responsivity factors
  - Uses cognitive and behavioral strategies to change offender behavior
- Train staff on core correctional practices
- Train staff to intervene where the offender is deficient in making decisions
- Include measures of fidelity and coaching sessions

# EPICS Session Structure

- Each contact session should be structured in the following way:
  1. Check-in
  2. Review
  3. Intervention
  4. Homework

# EPICS Session Structure

- **Check-in** is an opportunity to:
  - Promote a collaborative relationship with offender
  - Assess for crises/acute needs
  - Assess for compliance with conditions

# EPICS Session Structure

- **Review** is an opportunity to:
  - Enhance learning by reviewing previous interventions
  - Review previous homework assignment
  - Discuss community agency referrals
  - Set or review goals with the offender



# EPICS Session Structure

- **Intervention** is an opportunity to:
  - Target criminogenic needs using structured cognitive-behavioral techniques:
    - Behavior Chain
    - Cognitive Restructuring
    - Cost-Benefit Analysis
    - Skill Building
    - Problem Solving
    - Graduated Practice
  - Target specific responsivity issues

# EPICS Session Structure

- **Homework** is an opportunity to:
  - Generalize learning to new situations
  - Assign appropriate homework
    - Assign homework directly related to the intervention
    - Give offender clear expectations
    - Encourage offender to use interventions on risky situations

# EPICS Core Skills

## Throughout Model

- Relationship skills:
  - Active listening
  - Giving feedback
- Behavioral modification skills:
  - *Reinforcement*
  - Disapproval
  - Use of authority

## Interventions

- Motivational skills:
  - Cost-benefit analysis
- Cognitive behavioral skills:
  - *Cognitive restructuring*
  - Prosocial modeling
  - *Structured skill building*
  - Problem solving

# Section 3

EPICS Training and Coaching Processes

# EPICS Training and Coaching Process

- EPICS is a three-day training for officers and supervisors on RNR, core correctional practices, and the session components
- In order to ensure adherence to the model and to train the supervisors as coaches, monthly coaching sessions are included as part of the training

# EPICS Coaching Process

- Written individual feedback is provided on use of the model
- Group feedback is provided on use of the model
- Skills are reviewed, modeled, and practiced
- Support is provided to supervisors regarding implementation and on-going coaching

# EPICS Coaching Process

- In order to ensure adherence to the model and to train the supervisors as coaches, five video conference sessions are included as part of the training
  - **Sessions 1-2:** UC staff will review audio tapes and specific cases with all of the trainees
  - **Session 3-4:** Supervisors will partner with UC staff to conduct the reviews and coaching
  - **Session 5:** Supervisors will conduct the session, with UC staff providing support and coaching

# Franklin Co. EPICS Coaching with UCCI

- Approximately one month after training, staff sent in audiotapes of contact sessions to be coded for adherence to the EPICS model
- Written individual feedback was provided on use of the model
  - Supervisors reviewed feedback and audios with each staff
- Group feedback was provided on use of the model
- Skills were reviewed, modeled, and practiced



# Section 4

Barriers to Implementation  
and  
Tips for Successful Implementation

# Barriers to Implementing EPICS

- Department Size
- Officer Resistance
- Caseload Size
- Consistency among coaches

# Department Size

- Trained officers in three different waves
- Needed to recruit a large number of coaches
- Officers turn in a tape every month, but get feedback on one tape over a two month period

# Officer Resistance

- EPICS supported by chief and management team
- Coaches emphasize positive steps and find even “small victories” to encourage officers
- Officers are given choices about which booster session to attend

# Booster Sessions

- Coaches identify areas that need improvement to focus in on booster sessions
- Officers are required to attend one session in a two month period
- Booster sessions are limited to 12 participants to encourage participation and allow environment for practicing skills

# Booster Sessions



- Do your offenders ever come into your office visit with problems? This session will focus on deciding which intervention/tool would be most appropriate to use. Different scenarios will be played and officers will break into groups and discuss how they would handle the scenarios.
- Do you help your offenders set goals during office visits? Goal setting is an important, but often missed step in the EPICS session. This training will focus on setting goals and include a review of what should happen during the check-in and review sections.

# Caseload Size

- Officers added additional report days, allowing more time to meet with offenders
- Caseload management based on risk level and need areas instead of conditions
- Low risk offenders moved to quarterly reporting
- Efforts were made to reduce paperwork, allowing officers more time with offenders

# Consistency Among Coaches

- Due to department size, 12 coaches were trained
- With help from UC, developed coaching checklist that all coaches fill out with feedback form
- Meetings held once every two months to discuss coaching progress or concerns



# Coaching Checklist

## **Prior to giving feedback:**

1. I listened to the entire tape. Yes No
2. I have filled out all applicable sections on the feedback form. Yes No
3. I have included positive feedback for the officer on the form. Yes No
4. I have included specific suggestions/recommendations on how the officer can improve on the form. Yes No

## **During feedback:**

1. I asked the officer several open ended questions. Yes No
2. I asked permission to give feedback. Yes No
3. I applied the sandwich approach (strengths/areas for improvement/strengths) when giving feedback. Yes No
4. I was able to answer all of the officer's questions during feedback. Yes No  
If no, what question(s) were you not able to answer?

## **After feedback:**

1. What do you think went well during the feedback?
2. What could you have done better during the feedback?

# Tips for Successful Implementation

- Form an Implementation Team prior to the training
- Administrative support is critical:
  - Director of agency should provide clear expectations that acquiring this skill set is the number # 1 priority over the next 12 months
- Address workload for line staff and first line Managers
  - Plan for the additional time 'coaching' requires

# Tips for Successful Implementation

- Schedule boosters to follow up on the UCCI Training sessions
  - This will assist in the development of your Coaches
- Continue with boosters when you complete process with UCCI
  - Muscle memory comes from practice, practice, practice!!!
- Develop processes for continued improvement

# Importance of Continued Improvement

- Amend Audits and Performance Evaluations
  - Give staff 12 months to learn skills and then amend the review process
- Develop performance measures to measure success and integration:
  - Statewide performance measures on recidivism, retention, abscond rates and reduction of criminogenic needs.
  - Offender survey's
- Measure submission of tapes quarterly
- Reward and reinforce top performers
  - Tape of the Month

# Thank You

- Cara Thompson: UCCI EPICS Project Director
  - [thompc7@ucmail.uc.edu](mailto:thompc7@ucmail.uc.edu)
- Sara Shields: Manager and Internal Coach, Franklin Co, OH
  - [Sara\\_Shields@fccourts.org](mailto:Sara_Shields@fccourts.org)