

Travis Community Impact Supervision (TCIS)



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Travis CSCD Strengthens Probation

Probation departments in Texas and across the country are being challenged by increasing demands for services and expectations that probation should more effectively reduce recidivism. In addition, jail and prison overcrowding have become serious and increasingly burden local communities and the State. The Texas Legislature allocated additional funds to many probation departments with the expectation that departments show results. In response, departments have been moving towards a model of "evidence-based practices" that orients supervision to recidivism reduction. This entails changing operations, from paper-work management to casework. The change requires the implementation of more effective assessments based on scientific tools, use of supervision strategies that fit the needs and risk of the population, and programs that can produce results.

For the past 5 years, Travis County has been engaged in a "top to bottom" realignment of organizational practices to support a more effective operational model called Travis Community Impact Supervision or TCIS. TCIS involved reengineering the department to support strategies that research show to be effective in managing the risk of the probation population. TCIS includes two critical elements of a strong probation system: 1) enforcement of the conditions of probation, and 2) providing offenders with the resources and motivation to effect change by addressing their criminogenic traits. The key is to use methods that have been proven to work – thus, the term "Evidence-Based".

The initiative began with a comprehensive evaluation in the summer of 2005 that identified the strengths and weaknesses of the department. The goal of TCIS was to develop, test, implement and document organization-wide changes directed at improving assessment, supervision, sanctioning, staff training and quality control policies.

A Major Milestone

Creating a Central Diagnosis Process

Improving assessment practices is critical in reforming probation. Diagnosis of offenders along risk and criminogenic factors using evidence-based assessment tools is critical to: (a) distinguish offenders along characteristics that identify their supervision needs; (b) guide judges in setting appropriate conditions of supervision; (c) guide probation administrators in designing differentiated supervision strategies; (d) provide probation officers with reliable information to formulate and implement effective supervision plans; and, (e) devise clear outcome expectations for the different populations. Therefore, the first major task for the project was to reform the assessment practices in the department. These processes were radically altered by creating a new Diagnostic Report and a Central Diagnostic Unit. Both were approved by the Travis judiciary and implemented in April 2007.

The department made other major changes to support the new diagnostic process. These changes include:

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- New field supervision procedures to have probation officers more engaged in "motivational interviewing" techniques and case management aimed at reducing offenders' risk.
- Redesigned conditions of supervision and sanctioning strategies to match the diagnostic report matrix

which required the development of agreements with judges on the use of the new uniform policy.

- Reduced caseloads in regular units from an average of 129 direct cases to 110.
- A Felony Revocation Staffing and Review Committee to review officer revocation recommendations and the applicability of alternative sanctions in lieu of revocation.
- A Technical Violation Docket by Judge Mike Lynch, providing an opportunity for violators to remain on probation with modified conditions.
- A Mental Health Integrated Services Program and Mental Health Support Court for offenders with mental health diagnoses.

- A SMART Re-Entry Drug Court for residential and continuing care clients by Judge Mike Lynch.
- A DWI Court for 2nd offense DWIs by Judge Elisabeth Earle.
- An Absconder Unit that reviewed 5700 cases between January 05 & December 09, leading to a 53% decrease in the absconder population (4400 fewer absconders).
- A web-based interactive workforce development program working with Texas State Technical College.
- Redesign of the Sex Offender Management Program to be evidence-based, including a new policy and procedures manual.
- Establishment of a Counseling Center for intensive outpatient services and enhancement of the SMART residential treatment program.

Evaluations show a reduction in new crimes and revocations

The following charts illustrate the reduction in new arrests and felony probation revocations pre- and post-implementation of TCIS.

Travis County Re-Arrest Rates

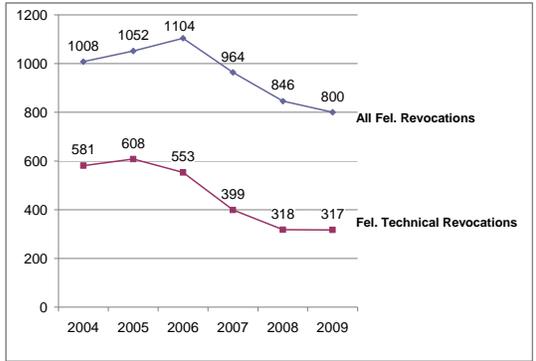
This comparison is of 1,287 felons placed on probation pre-TCIS (Jan-June 2006) to 614 post-TCIS probationers (July-Oct 2007). Both groups were tracked for 1 year after probation placements for new arrests using the TX DPS database. The percent re-arrested in 1 year after placement on probation declined from 29% in the pre-TCIS group to 24% in the post-TCIS group.

One-Year Re-Arrest Rates Lower After TCIS

| % Re-arrested 1 year later by Risk Level | Pre-TCIS | Post-TCIS | % Change in Rate Pre- to Post-TCIS |
|------------------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| LOW | 26% | 6% | -77% |
| MED | 26% | 13% | -50% |
| HIGH | 34% | 31% | -9% |
| OVERALL | 29% | 24% | -17% |

Travis County Revocations

Revocation trends show a sustained decline in the number of felony revocations in Travis County after implementation of TCIS.



Source: Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Community Justice Assistance Division (CJAD) Reports to the Governor and the Legislative Budget Board on Monitoring of Community Supervision Diversion Funds (2006-2009).

TCIS Summary

- The Department has accomplished a transformation that changed and strengthened the internal processes and culture of the organization to promote evidence-based practices.
- Staff has a clear and realistic vision of our future direction. Staff has been trained by national experts in evidence-based practices and has participated in intensive planning and implementation processes.
- Our assessment and sanctioning strategies have been enhanced, and officers have been trained to provide more intensive supervision for higher risk offenders.
- We have strengthened our quality control measures through research, evaluation, and measurement of outcomes (re-arrest) important to the Travis County Community.
- Initial results show reductions in new arrests, probation revocations, and costs to both the State and Travis County.
- A May 2009 report by the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG) estimates that over \$4.8 million in state incarceration costs were avoided due to reduced revocations.

Major aspects of the TCIS initiative are documented in reports that can be found at: http://www.co.travis.tx.us/community_supervision/TCIS_Initiative.asp.