



**Implementation of Effective Practices in Community
Supervision (EPICS) in Multnomah County**

November, 2015

Multnomah County Department of Community Justice
Research and Planning Unit
501 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Ste 250
Portland, OR 97214



Department of Community Justice

Director's Office

October 20, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

The Multnomah County Department of Community Justice (DCJ) is committed to continued learning and the adoption of evidence-based principles and practices. Implementing Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) is an example of this commitment. I am pleased to share a recent report published by our Research and Planning Team outlining our journey.

EPICS implementation began in 2010 and has resulted in an organizational and cultural shift. It has reshaped how we invest in resources and moved our case-management model to one based on risk and need. We have invested time and resources to provide our staff with the training and coaching they need to help improve program fidelity. While it is one of several tools our officers use when working with adults under our supervision, we believe that it is an important tool. Implementing EPICS has not been easy but we believe it has been a good investment and is beginning to pay off. We are using fewer jail beds and clients are increasing their participation in programs and services that are meeting the needs they have identified themselves.

With a number of states implementing reforms to save money from long prison stays, jurisdictions around the country are realizing they have more resources available to enhance their delivery of community supervision. EPICS is one tool that should be considered as more resources are invested in supervision services. The main goal of this report is to serve as a guide for those jurisdictions interested in adopting this model. Included in this report is background of EPICS and our steps to implementation. We welcome more conversation and discussion around our implementation of EPICS and are happy to share more about our work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Taylor".

Scott Taylor

Director



Multnomah County EPICS Implementation Report

Background

The reduction of crime is a long-standing endeavor of the criminal justice system. Currently, most jurisdictions triage responses to criminal behavior via probation/parole. Probation, broadly, refers to the deferment of traditional punitive sentences in favor of community-based supervision. In contrast to conventional punitive measures, community supervision places a higher focus on rehabilitation, fosters offender social stability, allows offenders to “give back” to a community, and is more cost-effective than incarceration. Traditional probationary methods generally include: monitoring of court-ordered probation/parole conditions; acute problem solving; and ad-hoc referrals to service providers. In recent decades, research has cautioned that these traditional measures can result in a lack of direct, human-service-based time with offenders; this effect, coupled with an over-emphasis on external measures of control (i.e., court-ordered mandates), may *not* be as effective in reducing recidivism (Bonita, Ruge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008¹). Rather, research suggests that supervision methods tailored to an offender’s motivation, behavior, and cognitive style could have a stronger impact on recidivism (Sperber, Latessa, & Makarios, 2013²; Labrecque, Smith, Schweitzer, & Thompson, 2014³; National Institute of Corrections, 2015⁴). In an effort to address these characteristics and to reduce recidivism among offender populations, community corrections analysts have identified the most empirically successful community corrections interventions and assembled them into the *principles of effective intervention* and the *core correctional practices*.

Effective Interventions & Core Correctional Practices

When used together, the *principles of effective intervention* and *core correctional practices* have been empirically successful in reducing recidivism (Bonita et al., 2008; Sperber et al., 2013; Labrecque et al., 2014; National Institute of Corrections, 2015). The fundamental components of *effective intervention*

Figure 1

Principles of Effective Intervention		
<p><u>Risk</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matching supervision to risk of recidivism (e.g., higher risk, greater supervision) • Measured by actuarial models (e.g., LSI-r; LS/CMI) 	<p><u>Need</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting of an offender’s criminogenic needs • Dynamic life factors correlated with criminal behavior - e.g., cognitive errors, substance abuse, lack of employment, etc. 	<p><u>Responsivity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating an offender appropriate to the type of offender • Includes accounting for variations in learning styles, culture, motivation, personality, and temper
<p><i>Definitions obtained from National Institute of Corrections (NIC)</i></p>		

techniques (see figure 1) include the evidence-based principles of offender **Risk**, **Need**, and **Responsivity** (RNR). Briefly, *Risk* refers to matching the amount of service (i.e., supervision) to a specific individual’s

¹ “Exploring the Black Box of Community Supervision” *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, Vol 47(3), 2008. 248-270

² “Examining the Interaction Between Level of Risk and Dosage of Treatment” *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, Vol 40(3), 2013, 338-348

³ “Targeting Antisocial Attitudes in Community Supervision Using the EPICS Model: An Examination of Change Scores on the Criminal Sentiment Scale” *Federal Probation*, Vol 77(3), 2014

⁴ <http://nicic.gov/theprinciplesofeffectiveinterventions>



risk of recidivism (e.g., the higher the risk, the greater the supervision) – risk is often measured with empirically derived actuarial models (e.g., LSI-r; LS/CMI). *Need* refers to the targeting of a given offender’s criminogenic needs (i.e., dynamic life factors that are strongly correlated with criminal behavior – e.g., cognitive errors, substance abuse, lack of employment, familial conflict, etc). *Responsivity* refers to treating an offender in a manner appropriate to the specific offender (i.e., accounting for variations in learning styles, culture, motivation, personality, temper, etc). Finally, *core correctional practices* are practical applications that allow for effective interaction with offenders while addressing offender *risk, need, and responsivity* (e.g., effective reinforcement/disapproval; proper use of authority; pro-social modeling; structured skill building; and problem solving) (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Types of Community Supervision Practices



Definitions obtained from Multnomah County /UCCI EPICS presentation cir. 01/2014

Despite the relative consensus among academic and professional circles regarding the efficacy of the *principles of effective intervention* and *core correctional practices*, their implementation into pre-existing corrections systems has remained a challenge nationwide. As such, several practice models have been created that provide a road-map for probation and parole agencies to integrate effective practices into daily operations – it should be noted that these models are *not* intended to replace a pre-existing corrections system or change an organizational structure; rather, they are designed to modify the traditional roles of parole/probationary agents from agents of change by enforcement to agents of change by behavior modification. In other words, these models empower community corrections officers to disrupt recidivism by helping offenders change the conditions that can lead to criminality. Currently, the three most notable *effective intervention* models include: Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR); Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS); and Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS). In recent years, EPICS has become the prevailing method of community corrections practice in Multnomah County and the State of Oregon.

EPICS

The EPICS model was developed in 2008 by researchers from the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI). While EPICS heavily emphasizes techniques grounded in interpersonal interaction, it is



also strongly grounded in socio-criminological theory; specifically, **Social Learning Theory**⁵ (See figure 3). Broadly, social learning theory is based on the theory of **Differential Association**⁶ which states that crime is a learned behavior among intimate groups (i.e., environments) and is committed when

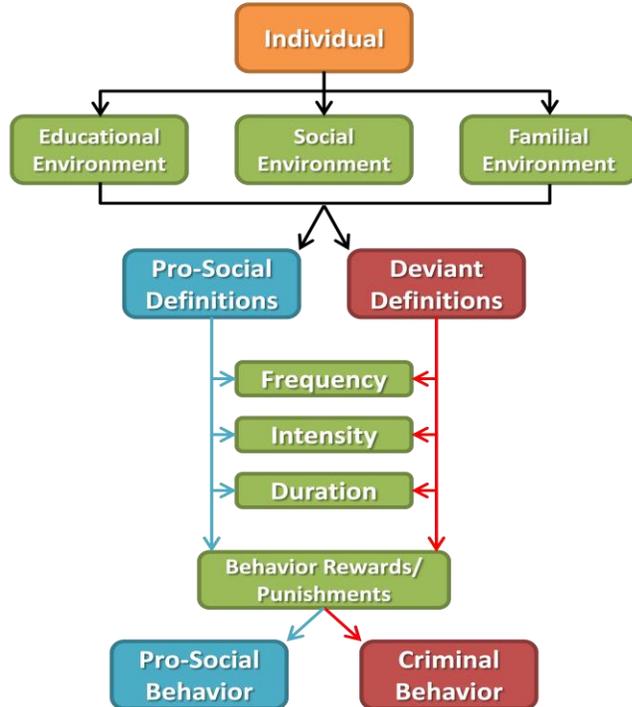


Figure 3: Social Learning Theory – Broad overview flowchart

individuals are exposed to more “criminal” (or deviant) definitions than “non-criminal” (or pro-social) definitions; additionally, crime is theorized to occur more frequently when persons are exposed to criminogenic definitions 1) early in life, 2) in greater duration, and 3) with greater intensity. Social learning theory further posits that family units, as well as an individual’s subjective exposure to “sub-cultures,” have the greatest impact on an individual’s propensity towards crime as those social structures inform the establishment of an individual’s learning style, normative ethics, and socio-cognitive reinforcement contingencies (i.e., dynamic life factors).

In addition to possessing a strong theoretical foundation, the EPICS model enhances community corrections efficacy in two crucial ways. First, EPICS allows for a greater frequency of training for community corrections professionals; this includes

intensive, multi-day emersions into EPICS theory as well as regularly occurring EPICS “booster” sessions designed to reinforce key EPICS concepts. Additionally, the EPICS model encourages regular assessments of Probation/Parole officers’ EPICS observance through regular evaluation of field performance.

The second prominent enhancement EPICS brings to community corrections involves the nature of the officer-client relationship. EPICS encourages the formation of a client-specific case management plan tailored to match a given offender with supervision services that inhibit impediments to responsivity and address individual risks and needs. Additionally, in opposition to traditional authoritarian approaches, EPICS teaches officers to approach offenders from a caring and fair, yet assertive position that is based in an established trust. Finally, the EPICS model trains staff to integrate cognitive-behavior therapeutic techniques to structured interventions (i.e., sessions).

EPICS outlines a detailed client-session structure that is grounded in risk, need, and responsivity principles

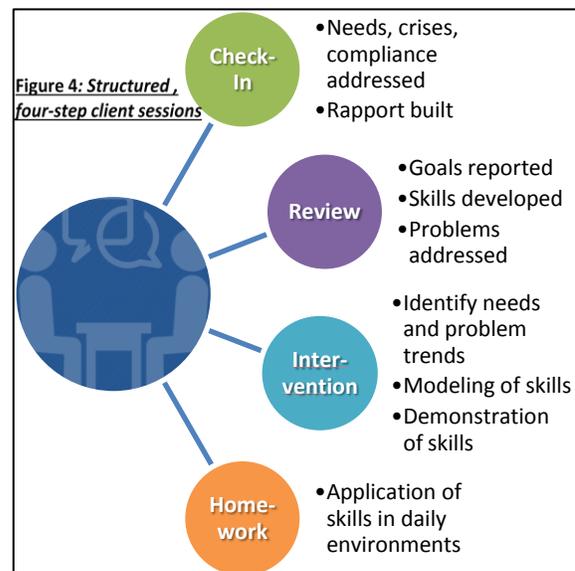


Figure 4: Structured, four-step client sessions

⁵ Ronald Akers’ Social Learning Theory - 1979

⁶ Edwin H. Sutherland’s Differential Association Theory - 1947



(see figure 4). In general, each contact with an offender should always follow a four-step intervention model: 1) **Check-in** – the section of time during which an offender’s needs and crises can be assessed, rapport can be built, and compliance can be discussed; 2) **Review** – the interval when progress on goals can be reported, previously discussed skills can be further developed and applied, and problems with skills can be addressed; 3) **Intervention** – the identification of areas of need and problematic trends and/or thinking as well as teaching/modeling of relevant skills with role playing (and feedback) to demonstrate assimilation of skills; and 4) **Homework** – tasks given to an offender that are designed to apply skills learned during sessions to real-world situations.

As previously mentioned, the core elements of the EPICS model (i.e., *principles of effective intervention* and *core correctional practices*) have been empirically successful in reducing recidivism. A leading focus in Multnomah County policy is to ensure public safety through the reduction of crime and recidivism; in an effort to achieve this goal, EPICS was brought to Multnomah County in the fall of 2010.

EPICS in Multnomah County, Oregon

Throughout most of the State of Oregon, community corrections responsibility is a function of the individual county as opposed to city or state governments; in Multnomah County, community corrections falls under the purview of the **Department of Community Justice (DCJ)**. DCJ announced it was adopting the EPICS model in September 2010. The espousal of EPICS was precipitated by recognition that the local community corrections organizational structure was not fully aligned with *effective intervention* techniques. In response to this realization, Multnomah (and also Marion) County proactively decided to test an effective intervention model that would provide the structure needed for observation of *effective intervention* techniques and *core correctional practices*. EPICS was chosen as Multnomah County’s effective intervention model as it allows for more frequent, intensive staff training on both effective intervention techniques and core correctional practices. Given the EPICS model was compiled by the University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute (UCCI), Multnomah County entered into a partnership with UCCI to provide training and guidance in EPICS implementation.

Implementation

The initial step of incorporating EPICS into Multnomah County community corrections practice involved the formation of an **implementation team**. The goal of this team was to determine implementation strategies and facilitate EPICS application into pre-existing DCJ practice. The implementation team was assembled shortly after the move to EPICS was announced in September 2010 and was comprised of the following personnel:

- **Community corrections managers** (i.e., unit/section & district managers)
- **Lead parole/probation officers**
- **Clinical and support staff** (i.e., Administration, Research, and Human Resources)
- **Representatives from UCCI**

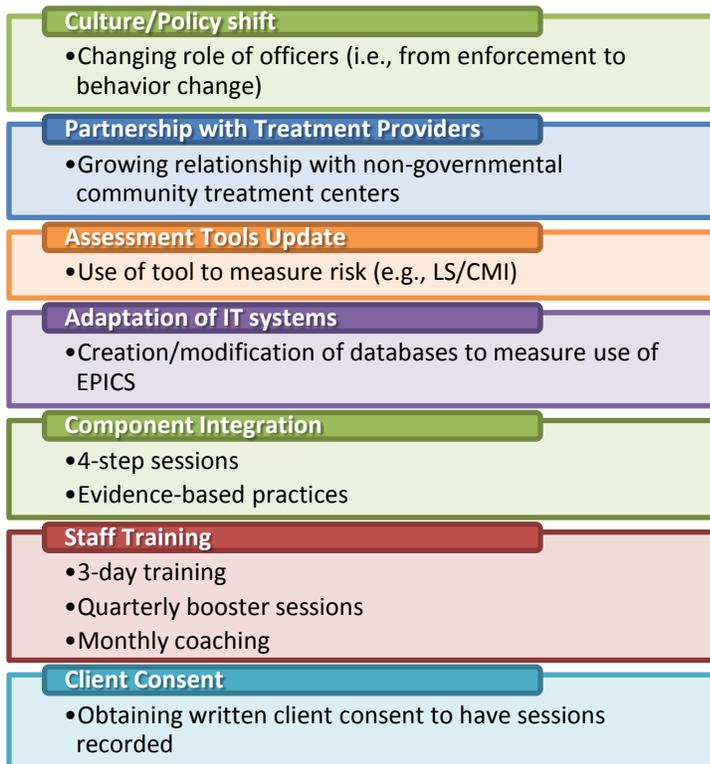
There were several immediate challenges that faced the implementation team (see figures 5 & 6); challenges included: **changing the culture** of community corrections in Multnomah County; negotiating partnerships with **treatment providers**; **updating systems tools** and information technology systems; **integrating EPICS components** into an already exhaustive workload; **training** existing staff; and obtaining **client consent** with staff **coaching**.



The first, overall challenge facing the implementation team was the necessity to alter the culture of community corrections in Multnomah County. As discussed previously, EPICS represented a practical **culture shift** that required staff to place stronger emphasis on client skills training, client emotional management, adaptation to *client* style (verses client adaptation to officer style), and incorporation of evidence-based literature (as opposed to subjective experience) as the foundation for regular practice. Additionally, EPICS required probation/parole officers to monitor their client sessions and to structure their actions around the EPICS model. Finally, EPICS further changed the previous DCJ community corrections culture by necessitating a closer relationship with local **treatment providers** as EPICS indicates that clients are best served when community corrections staff are in consistent communication and cooperation with their partners in community treatment services. While it was expected these culture changes were likely to be met with resistance, their enactment was ultimately necessary as they were integral components to success with EPICS.



Figure 6 – EPICS Implementation challenges (Detailed)



Updating pre-existing **systems tools** presented additional challenges to the implementation team. In terms of field tools, DCJ had to policies, procedures, and responses were designed to recognize offenders’ risks, needs, and responsivity as identified by actuarial assessment tools (i.e., Level of Service/Case Management Inventory [LS/CMI]). Regarding information technology systems, various databases had to be created and/or updated in order to allow for EPICS model fidelity tracking and performance assessment.

Integration of EPICS components into pre-existing DCJ practice presented significant challenges to the implementation team. One of the most difficult EPICS components to incorporate was the **four-step client intervention session** (refer to figure 4). Initially, the highly structured nature of the sessions was anticipated to

present a significant strain on an officer’s ability to adapt to dynamic clients and situations; however, it was ultimately determined that the session’s structural framework would allow for flexibility within the confines of each session step (e.g., check-in is necessary; exact method of check-in is not pre-determined).



Another significant challenge involved **training** staff in EPICS (*see figure 7*). The implementation team arranged for all applicable staff (i.e., probation/parole officers within the DCJ Adult Services Division [ASD]) to participate in EPICS training as soon as scheduling/availability would allow. Staff training in EPICS began in January 2011 with two of the six ASD units engaging in an intensive immersion in EPICS theory and practice during six distinct training sessions led by representatives from UCCI. Additionally, throughout the 2011 calendar year, staff trained in EPICS were required to participate in subsequent monthly “booster” sessions, via video-

Figure 7 – Frequency of Training

2011	2012 and beyond
3-day, intensive EPICS training with UCCI staff (A)	3-day, intensive EPICS training with UCCI staff (A)
Regular, internal booster sessions (A)	Quarterly, internal booster sessions (A)
6 EPICS Coaching Sessions w/UCCI (A)	Monthly/Quarterly sessions with coaches (A)
6 pre-coaching session conference calls w/UCCI (A)	Hosting of internal booster sessions (C)
Regular practice coding using EPICS Rating Form (C)	

(A) – All staff
(C) – Coaching staff

conference with UCCI, that were designed to reinforce critical EPICS components. By 2012, EPICS introductory training had been synthesized into a 3-day training event; at the end of 2012, all ASD probation/parole officers had received intensive training in EPICS. Over time, as knowledge and proficiency in EPICS increased among ASD probation/parole officers, the frequency of booster sessions decreased (from monthly to quarterly) and were led by internal trainers (as opposed to UCCI staff).

An additional layer of EPICS training involves regular officer **coaching** sessions. Similar to the basic EPICS construct, the implementation team designated all EPICS-trained probation/parole officers submit one tape-recorded client-session, per month, to a designated EPICS coach who would provide feedback on their EPICS fidelity. An integral component to note regarding the coaching process involves **client consent** to participate in coaching. Before a community corrections officer records a client session, the officer must obtain consent from the client; during this process, the client is brought to understand that their session recording is only being used for quality and training purposes for EPICS-practicing staff.

In the early days of Multnomah County’s EPICS implementation (i.e., 2011), representatives from UCCI fulfilled the role of coach to EPICS-trained officers until DCJ could sustain internal coaching capabilities. At the time of implementation, the internal DCJ personnel designated as EPICS coaches were the (approximately two dozen) lead probation/parole officers and criminal justice managers. During the 2011 calendar year, these persons participated in six UCCI-led trainings (in addition to the initial EPICS intensive training) designed to teach staff how to code EPICS tapes, generate feedback, and coach to line staff.

EPICS represented a practical culture shift that required adaptation to *client* style and incorporation of evidence-based literature as the foundation for regular practice.

At the beginning of 2012, DCJ assumed full responsibilities of the coaching process independent of UCCI. When an officer submitted a tape, the receiving lead/manager would listen to and code each tape utilizing an assessment tool created by UCCI that is designed to generate feedback on a given client session. After coding is complete, the lead would set up a coaching session, with the tape-submitting



officer, where the lead can personally deliver feedback and discuss methods of maintaining fidelity with the EPICS model while reinforcing key concepts. It is important to note, that due to the significant amount of strain the coaching process placed on managers/lead officers, extra staff was assigned to coaching personnel in diverting appropriate portions of their workload to alternate, appropriate staff.

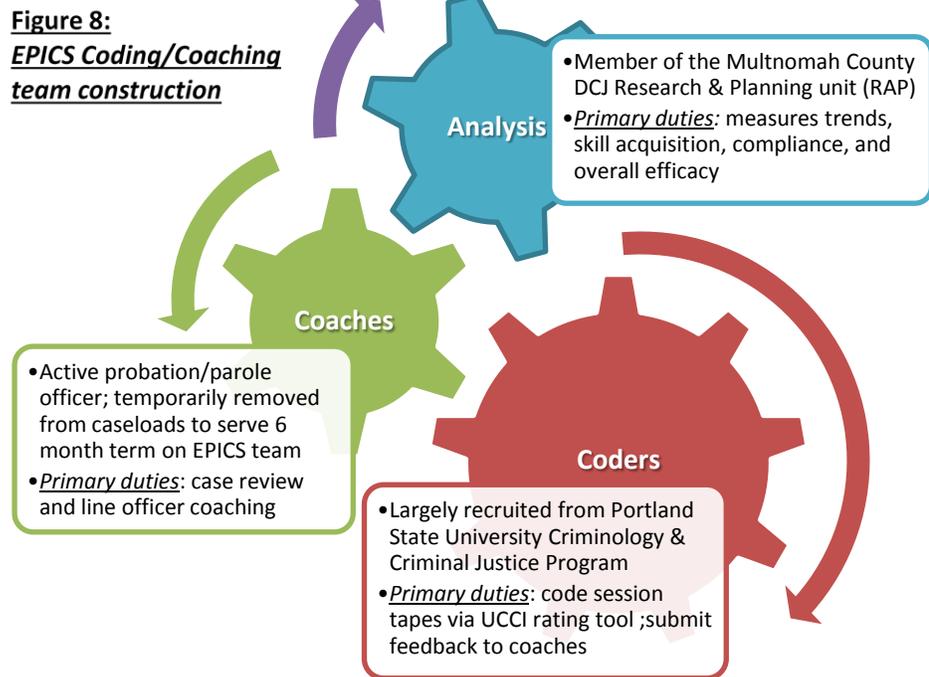
By the end of 2012, the sustainability of EPICS adherence had become notably strained due to, in-part, the coaching process. Despite the large number of internal coaches, leads/managers found it increasingly difficult to provide client-session feedback in a timely and consistent manner due to their attention being diverted from officer coaching to their regular duties as well as to the application of newer, post-EPICS programs. Given the inherent difficulties in balancing daily lead/manager operations with providing punctual and consistent EPICS feedback, the decision was made to construct a specialized team dedicated to EPICS coding and coaching.

EPICS Coaching Team

The new EPICS coaching team (assembled in 2013) was designed to consist of three elements: **coding**, **coaching**, and **analysis** (see figure 8). *Coding* staff predominantly consist of current and/or former students recruited from the Portland State University Criminology & Criminal Justice Department; their primary duty is to utilize specially constructed rating forms to code and rate line officer EPICS performances based on taped client-session recordings sent (monthly) to the EPICS team by probation/parole officers. Feedback generated by the coders is then forwarded to team coaches. The *coaches* are active probation/parole officers who predominantly handle case review and line officer feedback delivery. In

general, these officers are removed from an active caseload for a 6-month period to serve as a full time coach; at the end of a given term, the officers rotate back into their caseloads and are replaced by new line officers – of note, it was subsequently discovered that these rotational term periods were allowing officers to incorporate new, advanced skills and knowledge into their caseloads. The final

element of the EPICS coaching team is the inclusion of a member of the *DCJ Research and Planning (RAP) Unit*; this member provides needed analytical data to the team in an effort to report on trends, to provide measurements on skill acquisition and overall EPICS efficacy, and to report out on data derived from EPICS-related analyses. Together, this team continues to meet weekly to discuss coding and feedback strategies, officer EPICS compliance, and efficient processes in EPICS coding and coaching.



An additional function of the EPICS team involves annual officer/office-unit audits. In this auditing process, members of the EPICS coaching team are assigned to review a random, representative sample of daily line officer output (e.g., case notes), per officer, in an attempt to measure how often each officer is utilizing and completing EPICS in their daily client interactions. Once individual officer data is obtained, an average percentage of overall EPICS utilization is generated for each field office (e.g., frequency of EPICS use for all officers within the North County office is combined to generate an overall average score for the North office). After audit data is collected, it is used to report on officer/field-office compliance as well as to inform quality improvement. Currently, EPICS-trained DCJ staff utilizes and completes EPICS in over 60% of caseloads; DCJ is striving to achieve 80% use of EPICS in caseloads.

The future of EPICS in Multnomah County

The application of EPICS has grown significantly in the years since its initial implementation into Multnomah County DCJ practice. The most notable advancements include: the EPICS model evolving to be responsive to the full diversity of clients supervised in Multnomah County (i.e., ethnic, cultural, ideological, and geographical variations); greater attention being drawn towards the adaption of the model among mentally ill offenders; the frequency of training and booster sessions growing; partnerships with non-governmental entities (e.g., education, healthcare, and trade programs) increasing; and coding, coaching, and feedback strategies becoming more efficient (i.e., rating/feedback form revision; coaching session restructuring; etc.).

In the near future, DCJ plans to implement additional changes to EPICS-related procedures in an effort to further adapt EPICS to DCJ staff and clients. First, DCJ has recognized that past efforts to train staff in EPICS has been primarily oriented towards probation/parole officers; soon, DCJ will offer EPICS training (i.e., 3-day sessions and quarterly boosters) to other DCJ staff that interact with clients (i.e., Corrections Technicians, Corrections Counselors, Community Works leaders, Administrative staff, and Management staff). Second, DCJ plans to alter the frequency of officer coaching; specifically, coaching session frequency is planned to decrease among officers who have demonstrated long-standing proficiency with EPICS (i.e., officers who have been practicing EPICS for over one year and have shown consistent excellence with the model will not be required to submit tapes monthly to the EPICS coaching team); irrespective of this decrease in coaching frequency, DCJ plans to continue to strive for achieving the benchmark of 80% use of EPICS in daily officer practice. Third, in an effort to provide more timely feedback to line staff, the EPICS coaching team is progressively moving towards “live” coaching; in this process, instead of an officer submitting a tape-recorded session, a coach will arrange to personally attend a client session and immediately deliver feedback to the line officer, using the UCCI-based rating form, following completion of the session. Per data generated by the DCJ RAP team, preliminary use of live coaching has already resulted in an over 96% decrease in coaching turnaround time (i.e., interval between date a session tape was submitted and the date coaching occurred). Finally, DCJ has plans to implement new EPICS-grounded policies and procedures designed to better address mental illness in DCJ clients; a pilot program is expected to go in effect in early 2016.

To date, Multnomah County is one of many jurisdictions across the U.S. represented in Oregon, California, South Dakota, Ohio, Louisiana, and New York to have adopted EPICS in an effort to curb recidivism. As populations change and evidence-based practices evolve, the staff of Multnomah County Department of Community Justice will maintain their efforts to develop processes for continued quality improvement. While we recognize that EPICS implementation is never fully complete, Multnomah County DCJ will strive to advance the effect of EPICS in partnership with the criminal justice community, treatment community, and the community at large.



Figure 9 – Past, present, and future of EPICS in Multnomah County

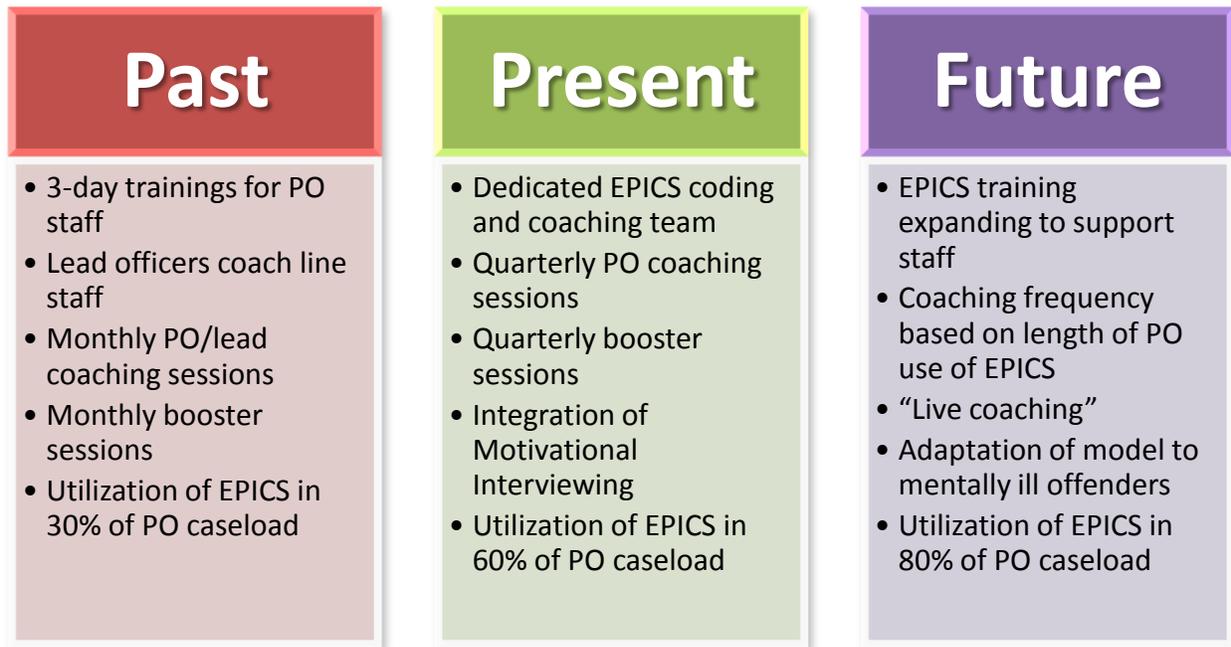




Figure 10 – EPICS Model Flowchart: Broad Overview of EPICS in Multnomah County DCJ practice

