

# **Embracing Evidence Based Programming in County Jails for Workforce Development Within the ECD Model**

Joseph L Brooks

County Mayor

Claiborne County, Tennessee

Tennessee Certified Economic Developer

Certification Capstone Report

March 2024

TCED Staff Advisor: Dr. David Kolzow

Capstone Project Mentor: Kingsley Brock

Capstone Project Coordinator: Kathy Barber

## ***Introduction***

In Tennessee, like many other regions across the United States, county jails face complex challenges in managing inmate populations and reducing recidivism rates. Amidst these challenges, the implementation of Evidence-Based Programming (EBP) emerges as a crucial strategy for implementing outcomes within the correctional system. EBP involves the application of interventions and policies grounded in empirical research and data-driven practices. By prioritizing evidence-based approaches, Tennessee county jails can enhance rehabilitation efforts, mitigate the cycle of incarceration, and ultimately foster safer communities. This paper will delve into the imperative for integrating EPB within county jails, highlighting the benefits and outcomes associated with this proactive approach.

EBP represents a fundamental shift in correctional practices, emphasizing the utilization of empirical research to inform the development and implementation of programs aimed at reducing recidivism and enhancing inmate outcomes. Within the Claiborne County jail, the integration of EBP signifies a commitment to evidence-driven decision-making, ensuring that interventions are tailored to address the specific needs of incarcerated individuals. Moreover, the introduction of the Education, Career, Development (ECD) model within this context represents a holistic framework designed to promote education, skill-building, and workforce development among inmates. By combining EBP principles with a focus on educational and vocational opportunities, the ECD model aims to empower individuals with the tools and resources necessary for successful reintegration into society. Delving into the dynamics of EBP and the transformative potential of the ECD model marks the beginning of a journey towards safer communities and brighter futures for those within the criminal justice system.

### ***ECD Model Components***

The ECD model comprises a multifaceted approach to inmate rehabilitation, integrating educational programs, career development initiatives, and personal development support to promote successful reintegration into society. Educational programs provide inmates with opportunities to acquire academic qualifications and vocational skills essential to post-release success. Research by Davis et al (2013) highlights the positive impact of correctional education on reducing recidivism rates, with participation associated with a 43% reduction in recidivism. Additionally, career development initiatives within the ECD model such as job readiness workshops and vocational training programs aim to enhance inmates' employability and economic self-sufficiency. A study by Gordon and Weldon (2003) underscores the importance of vocational training in reducing recidivism, with participants exhibiting lower rates of re-offending compared to non-participants. Moreover, personal development support, including mental health services and life skills training, addresses the holistic needs of inmates and contributes to positive behavioral changes. Research by Kessels et al (2017) emphasizes the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral interventions in reducing recidivism and improving psychosocial outcomes among incarcerated individuals. By combining these components, the ECD model offers a comprehensive framework for promoting rehabilitation and successful reintegration among inmates in correctional settings.

### ***Research and Data***

Research and data on the impact of EBP in correctional settings provide compelling evidence of its effectiveness in reducing recidivism rates and promoting successful reintegration

of individuals into society. Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive outcome associated with EBP interventions, which are grounded in empirical research and tailored to address criminogenic risk factors among incarcerated populations. For instance, a meta-analysis by Andrews and Bonta (2010) found that correctional programs based on principles of risk, need, and responsivity were associated with a 35% reduction in recidivism compared to control groups. Similarly, a study by Lipsey (2009) highlighted the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral interventions in reducing recidivism rates by targeting underlying cognitive distortions and teaching pro-social skills.

The ECD model represents a promising approach to reducing recidivism and promoting successful reintegration among inmates through education, vocational training, and personal development support. While specific studies evaluating the effectiveness of the ECD model may be limited, research on similar approaches underscores its potential impact. For example, a study by Davis et al (2013) demonstrated the positive effects of correctional educational programs on reducing recidivism rates, with participants exhibiting lower rates of re-offending compared to non-participants.

Key metrics for evaluating the success of EBP initiatives and the ECD model in correctional settings include recidivism rates, program completion rates, post-release employment rates, and measures of inmate well-being and behavior while incarcerated. Recidivism rates serve as a primary indicator of program effectiveness, reflecting the extent to which individuals who have participated in EBP interventions or the ECD model re-offend after release. Program completion rates provide insights into participant engagement and adherence to program requirements, while post-release employment rates measure the successful transition of individuals into the workforce. Additionally, assessments of inmate well-being and behavior,

such as disciplinary infractions and mental health outcomes, offer valuable insights into the impact of EBP initiatives and the ECD model on the overall correctional environment.

As research in this field continues to evolve, ongoing evaluation and analysis of key metrics will be essential for refining EBP practices, optimizing the ECD model, and maximizing positive outcomes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system. By prioritizing evidence-based approaches and rigorous evaluation, correctional agencies can promote rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and contribute to safer communities.

### ***Implementation Challenges***

Implementation of EBP in correctional settings faces various challenges that must be addressed to ensure successful adoption and effectiveness. One significant challenge is resource constraints, as correctional facilities often operate with limited budgets, impacting their ability to invest in program development and sustain EBP initiatives over time (Gendreau et al 1996). Without adequate resources, programs may struggle to meet the needs of inmates and achieve desired results. In Claiborne County, funding for its justice center is \$3,959,392, which is approximately 24% of the total general fund operational expenses. Funding for the general fund comes almost entirely from the collection of property taxes and any additional funding would need to be realized through a property tax increase. Unfortunately, most increases in local property tax revenue yields many to question the viability of such programs, and calls into question the overall benefits specifically in the area of criminal justice rehabilitation.

Staff training and buy-in represent another critical challenge. Correctional staff members may lack familiarity with EBP principles and be resistant to change due to entrenched practices or skepticism about new approaches (Ward & Gannon, 2006). Effective staff training programs

are essential for building staff knowledge and confidence in implementing EBP interventions, as well as fostering buy-in and support among frontline staff. Unfortunately, many of the grant funding opportunities being utilized in Claiborne County have little room for training. However, since the correctional staff pay is already allocated within the jail budget, working with the sheriff to ensure those training opportunities has been met with little resistance.

Tailoring programs to meet the diverse needs of inmates is another challenge to EBP implementation. Inmates come from diverse backgrounds and present with varying criminogenic risk factors, requiring programs to be flexible, culturally sensitive, and responsive to individual differences (Taxman, 2008). Developing and delivering evidence-based interventions that address the specific needs and risk factors of each participant is essential for maximizing program effectiveness and promoting positive outcomes.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving collaboration among correctional administrators, staff, researchers, and community partners. Claiborne County is investing in resources, providing staff training and support, and tailoring programs to inmate needs, to help correctional personnel to overcome barriers to EBP implementation and promote successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Unfortunately, the bulk of this investment has been made in the form of grants, with little local revenue given with the exception of grant matches. Ideally, EBP would be improved by allocating local funding for the training necessary to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of such programming.

### ***Collaboration and Partnerships***

Collaboration and partnerships between county jails and external stakeholders, including educational institutions, local businesses, and government agencies, are crucial for the successful

implementation of EBP within correctional settings. These collaborations leverage the expertise, resources, and support of various entities to enhance the quality and effectiveness of inmate programs and services.

Educational institutions play a vital role in providing academics and vocational training opportunities to incarcerated individuals. Collaborations between county jails and educational institutions facilitate the delivery of educational programs, including GED preparation, high school equivalency courses, and post-secondary education. Research by Davis et al (2013) underscores the positive impact of correctional education on reducing recidivism rates, highlighting the importance of educational partnerships in promoting successful reintegration. Walters State Community College's (WSCC) Tazewell campus has played a crucial role in helping to implement programming within this area.

Local businesses offer valuable opportunities for workforce development and job placement for individuals transitioning from incarceration to the community. Collaborations between the Claiborne County jail and local businesses provide inmates with access to vocational training programs, apprenticeships, and job placement services. Once released, inmates continue to work with employers where jail-to-work opportunities have been offered prior to being released.

Government agencies also play a crucial role in supporting EBP initiatives with the Claiborne County jail. Collaborations between correctional agencies and government entities facilitate access to funding, technical assistance, and policy guidance to support program implementation and sustainability. Additionally, government agencies provide resources and support for reentry programs, housing assistance, and social services to facilitate successful community reintegration. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), The Office of

Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP), Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC), and the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) have been crucial partnerships surrounding implementation of evidence-based practices inside the Claiborne County jail.

Overall, collaborations and partnerships between county jails and external stakeholders are essential for advancing evidence-based practices and promoting positive outcomes for incarcerated individuals. By leveraging the expertise and resources of educational institutions, local businesses, and government agencies, correctional agencies can enhance program effectiveness, reduce recidivism, and foster successful reintegration into society.

### ***Monitoring and Evaluation***

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of EBP initiatives within county jails are vital for assessing program effectiveness and ensuring ongoing improvement. By implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems, correctional workers can systematically collect data on key performance indicators such as program completion rates, participant outcomes, and recidivism rates (Barnoski, 2002). Regular assessment of these metrics allows correctional administrators to track the progress of EBP initiatives over time and identify areas of improvement. Additionally, soliciting feedback from stakeholders, including inmates, staff members, and community partners, provides valuable insights into program strengths and weaknesses (Duwe & Goldman, 2009). Based on feedback and outcomes, adjustments to program design, delivery, and implementation can be made to optimize effectiveness and align with best practices (MacKenzie, 2006). Through continued assessment and improvement, correctional agencies can enhance the impact of EBP initiatives, promote positive outcomes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system, and contribute to safer communities.



## *Case Studies*

While there is not a specific case study available for the ECD model, showcasing its implementation and impact in county jails, there are examples of successful programs and initiatives that align with the principles of the ECD model to illustrate positive inmate transformations, and there are several such programs happening in Claiborne County.

The EBP grant is funded by OCJP is a non-matching grant and employs one master's level Social Worker and one bachelor's level Social Worker. Both individuals are working in tandem to ensure inmates have the skills needed so they do not return to jail. The master's level Social Worker is responsible for providing various forms of evidence-based approaches, specifically Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) intended to shift an inmate's underlying behaviors that caused them to be incarcerated. The bachelor level social worker is responsible for assisting inmates prior to being released to ensure they have access to things they need prior to being release; drug rehab programs, housing assistance, job placement, and assistance with reinstating driving privileges.

Another example is a coding class that teaches inmates how to develop websites and other internet-based technologies. Claiborne County partnered with Preserve Now who received grant funding via ARC with no match for the county to institute this educational program and is the first county jail in the state offering such an educational opportunity. This classroom opportunity allows inmates to leave the county jail under supervision to receive virtual training. The training program has twelve modules and after completion of the first six modules inmates will be eligible to receive job placement within the area of web design.

Another example is a jail to work program that allows women who are eligible for alternate sentencing to be housed in a facility where they are engaged daily by staff who help them identify areas, they need help with, and then provide the appropriate therapy to achieve the desired outcome. In partnership with Helen Ross McNabb, the Women's Jail-To-Work program participants receive therapy, life skill training and job placement assistance. Program funding of \$500,000 was made possible via an ARC INSPIRE Grant that makes Investments Supporting Partnerships in Recovery Ecosystems possible. This funding required a match of 30% which was funded by Claiborne County. Claiborne County was one of two counties in Tennessee that received this inaugural funding. Although the initial program lasts only twelve weeks, each of the participants are eligible for an additional six months of on-site housing to further assist them in reaching their goals post incarceration. To date, the program is seeing a 92% completion rate for both the initial and additional periods. The program relies on a partnership with the Criminal Judge to give alternate sentencing options and the District Attorney to allow it for the participants in lieu of jail time. During the duration of time within the program, the women receive basic life skill training, therapies to help with substance use disorder and finding employment. A study by Steurer et al (2001) evaluated the impact of the Correctional Education programming and found that participants demonstrated improved literacy skills, higher rates of educational attainment, and increased employment opportunities post-release.

Additionally, Claiborne County received a Three-Star non-match grant of \$50,000 to purchase virtual welders. In partnership with WSCC the state's Workforce Development, inmates housed in the county jail receive experience with welding leading to a certificate. This certificate allows inmates to gain employment or pursue continued education in the welding field. Claiborne County also allows inmates, who have been vetted to leave custody daily to

work at a local manufacturer, Homesteader Trailers LLC, where they manufacture cargo trailers, hydraulic dump trailers, motorcycle trailers, enclosed car hauler trailers and horse trailers. While incarcerated, inmates' income is held in trust by the county finance department. Funding can be used to pay housing costs for their dependents, court costs and restitutions, and other fines determined by the courts. Upon release, the funding is released to the inmates. Historically, funding has been used for purchasing a vehicle or obtaining housing. To date, the largest amount paid out to an individual has been \$47,000.

These examples demonstrate the transformative potential of programs and initiatives that align with the principles of the ECD model, even if they are not explicitly labeled as such. By providing educational opportunities, correctional programs can empower inmates with the tools and resources necessary for successful reintegration into society. While more case studies specifically focused on the ECD model may be needed to further validate its effectiveness, these examples illustrate the positive impact of holistic approaches to rehabilitation and reentry with correctional settings.

### ***Future Considerations***

Future considerations surrounding the innovations of EBP for inmate workforce development should prioritize several key areas to maximize effectiveness and promote successful reintegration into society. First there is a need for increased collaboration between correctional facilities, educational institutions, and local businesses to expand access to vocational training programs aligned with labor market demands. By offering industry-recognized certifications and apprenticeships in high-demand fields, inmates can acquire valuable skills and credentials that enhance their employability upon release. Second, integrating technology and online learning platforms into workforce development initiatives can facilitate

access to education and training resources, particularly for inmates in remote or underserved areas. Furthermore, providing comprehensive reentry support services, including job placement assistance, resume building workshops, and mentorship programs, can help bridge the gap between incarceration and employment, facilitating successful community reintegration.

In terms of scaling the ECD model, policymakers and correctional administrators should consider several policy recommendations to promote widespread adoption and implementation. First, establishing clear guidelines and standards for correctional facility design based on ECD principles can ensure consistency and quality across jurisdictions. This could involve developing model designs, best practice guidelines, and accreditation standards that incorporate evidence-based approaches to facility planning, layout, and programming. Additionally, incentivizing the adoption of the ECD model through funding opportunities, grants, and technical assistance can encourage correctional agencies to invest in facility upgrades and renovations that prioritize rehabilitation and reintegration. Moreover, fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration among correctional professionals through conferences, workshops, and peer learning networks can facilitate the dissemination of best practices and promote continuous improvement in correctional facility design and operation. By prioritizing inmate workforce development and scaling the ECD model, policymakers and practitioners can advance evidence-based approaches to corrections, promote positive outcomes for individuals involved in the criminal justice system, and contribute to safer and more resilient communities.

### ***Conclusion***

The importance of EBP in county jails cannot be overstated. EBP represents a transformational approach to correctional practices, grounded in rigorous research and aimed at promoting rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, and fostering successful reintegration into society.

When considering the myriad of benefits of EBP, from enhancing public safety to improving individual outcomes of incarcerated individuals, it is clear that further implementation and research are essential. By expanding access to evidence-based interventions, investing in staff training and resources, and fostering collaborations between correctional agencies, education institutions, and community partners, we can advance the adoption of EBP principles and practices in county jails statewide. Moreover, continuing research and evaluation are critical for deepening the basic understanding of what works in correctional settings, informing policy and practice, and driving innovation in the field of criminal justice. Therefore, let us heed the call to action and redouble our efforts to prioritize evidence-based approaches, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to achieve rehabilitation, redemption, and a second chance at a productive and fulfilling life.

- Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). Rehabilitating criminal justice policy and practice. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 16(1), 39-55. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018362>
- Barnoski, R. (2002). Washington State's Implementation of Aggression Replacement Training for Juvenile Offenders: Preliminary Findings, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, available at: [www.wsipp.wa.gov](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov)
- Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2013). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*. RAND Corporation.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt4cgdz5>
- Duwe, G., & Goldman, R. A. (2009). The impact of prison-based treatment on sex offender recidivism: evidence from Minnesota. *Sexual abuse: a journal of research and treatment*, 21(3), 279–307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063209338490>
- Gendreau, P., Goggin, C., & Paparozzi, M. (1996). Principles of effective assessment for community corrections. *Federal Probation*, 60(3), 64–70.
- Gordon, H. R. D., & Weldon, B. (2003). The Impact of Career and Technical Education Programs on Adult Offenders: Learning Behind Bars. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 54(4), 200–209. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23292175>
- Kessels, E., Nozawa, J., Veldhuis, T. M., Entenmann, E., & van der Heide, L. (2017). IMPLEMENTING EVIDENCE-BASED REHABILITATIVE INTERVENTIONS. In M. Lefas (Ed.), *Correcting the Course: Advancing Juvenile Justice Principles for Children Convicted of Violent Extremism Offenses* (pp. 23–30). Global Center on Cooperative Security. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20261.8>

- Lipsey, M. W. (2009). The Primary Factors that Characterize Effective Interventions with Juvenile Offenders: A Meta-Analytic Overview, *Victims & Offenders*, 4:2, 124-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564880802612573>
- MacKenzie, D. L. (2006). What works in corrections: Reducing the criminal activities of offenders and delinquents. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.107/CBO9780511499470>
- Taxman, F.S. (2008). No Illusions: Offender and Organizational Change in Maryland's Proactive Community Supervision Efforts. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 7: 275-302. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2008.00508.x>
- Ward, T., & Gannon, T. A. (2006). Rehabilitation, etiology, and self-regulation: The comprehensive good lives model of treatment for sexual offenders. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 11(1), 77-94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2005.06.001>