

The RNR Simulation Tool: Knowledge Translation in Santa Cruz, CA

Santa Cruz Probation Department

Amy M. Murphy, M.P.P. & Faye S. Taxman, Ph.D.

Michael Caudy, Ph.D., Stephanie A. Ainsworth, M.A. George Mason University, Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence!



The Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) Model

The Risk-Need-Responsivity framework suggests that improved offender outcomes will result when justice-involved individuals are linked to programming based on their static criminal justice risk and dynamic treatment needs (e.g. substance use disorders, antisocial cognitions, mental health disorders).

• Three core RNR principles:

- **Risk** – match level of service to offender’s risk to reoffend
- **Need** – target key behaviors we know will have an impact via specific responses (evidence-based practices)
- **Responsivity** – treatment effects are maximized when interventions are cognitive-based and tailored to offender’s risk, needs, & strengths

The Goal of the RNR Simulation Tool in Santa Cruz

Chief Probation Officer Scott MacDonald of Santa Cruz, CA, reached out to the Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence! to address the need for more responsive programming for clients, especially those on probation through Assembly Bill 109 (AB-109). The RNR Simulation Tool assists justice agencies in determining what programming is most effective in reducing recidivism and improving offender outcomes within their population. The tool is also designed to guide resource allocation and help criminal justice agencies identify service provision gaps. The proper utilization of these knowledge translation tools can have a significant impact on recidivism at a system level.



The RNR Simulation Tool

Three web-based portals housed on the CJ-TRAK website:

- **Assess an Individual** – makes programming recommendations for individual offenders based on inputted information about their risk, criminogenic needs, and other clinically relevant factors; estimates a percent reduction in recidivism that may be expected if the offender is matched to the level of programming that is consistent with their needs.
- **The RNR Program Tool for Adults** – classifies programs into one of six categories based on primary target and grades each on treatments offered, program content, quality, dosage, and other factors; provides recommendations for how the program can be refined to better achieve responsivity.
- **Assess Jurisdiction’s Capacity** – uses population-level data to assess a jurisdiction’s capacity to provide responsivity; based on inputted data about the prevalence of risk and needs and the programming that is available within each jurisdiction, this portal identifies system-level service provision gaps.

Knowledge Translation in Santa Cruz

The Issues:

- Corrections reform in California has resulted in an influx of probationers to county systems, both in jails and in the community, but resources are limited.
- While AB-109 offenders are non-violent, non-serious, non-sex offenders, many are higher-risk than the general probation populations.

The Steps:

1. Chief MacDonald and ACE! introduced the jurisdiction (probation staff and jail- and community-based programs) to the RNR suite of tools.
2. ACE! worked with programs one-on-one to help them understand the RNR Program Tool for Adults and its output.
3. The department has begun to implement new practices to improve referral processes.
4. ACE! will use data from the existing risk-needs instrument and case management system to build a synthetic database specific to Santa Cruz.
5. The probation department will use the output from the tools to determine the jurisdiction’s programming needs and how to allocate resources.

Offender Population:

- 41% high risk; 38% moderate; 22% moderate
- Mean age = 35.5 (range: 18-84)
- 17.4% female; 82.5% male
- 43.0% white (non-Hispanic); 38.3% Hispanic; 5.0% African American
- 50% rate of reconviction, with 57% occurring in the first year on supervision

Recommendations and Next Steps for Santa Cruz

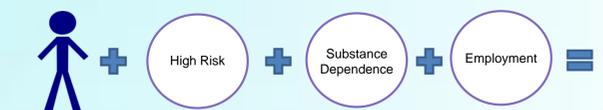
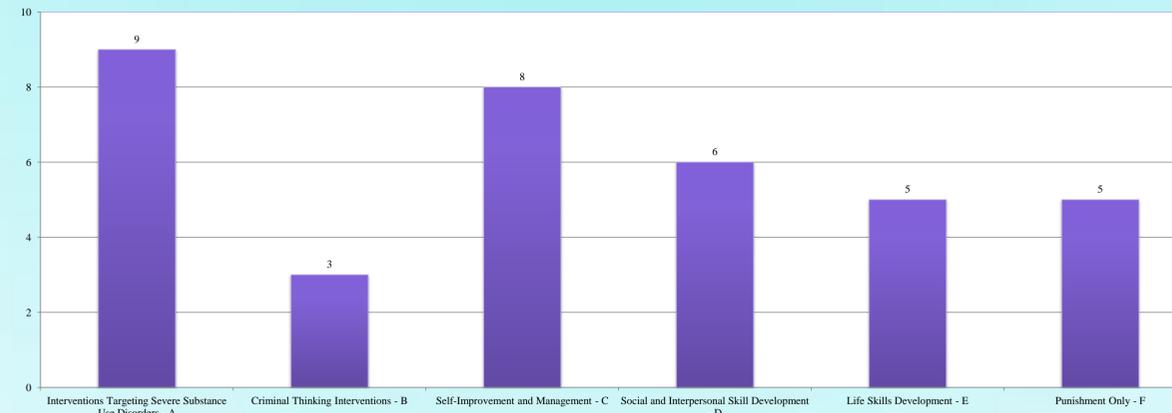
ACE! Recommendations

- Share offender risk/needs information with programs when making a referral.
- Request that each program: 1. reflect on their scores; 2. determine two ways they can improve their programs by addressing weaknesses in the Need, Responsivity, or Implementation domains; and 3. develop a plan for addressing those two reforms in the next six months.
- Develop a universal intake form for programs to use.
- Host training in cognitive behavioral techniques for all treatment providers in jurisdiction.

Next Steps

- Probation will distribute GMU feedback on Program Tool output to sites with a form that asks programs for input and to identify two areas on which to work.
- GMU and Maxarth are developing a database that is specific to the risk/needs, demographics, and stabilizers in Santa Cruz to inform the Assess Jurisdiction’s Capacity tool and identify gaps in services
- Probation will disseminate information from the CAIS risk/needs assessment to programs when making a referral.
- Probation will host a training for providers in cognitive behavioral techniques.

Current Distribution of Programs by Category



RNR Program Level A: Treatment focuses on cognitive restructuring techniques; Interventions may include residential drug treatment, therapeutic communities, specialty courts, or intensive outpatient treatment; dosage of approximately 300 clinical hours is recommended for this program level.

For More Information:

Contact amurph10@gmu.edu or visit www.gmuace.org.