

Evidence-Based Correctional Program Checklist-Group
Assessment (CPC-GA)

Crossroads Correctional Center
Thinking For A Change
Final Report

By:

Tonya Dempster, Managed Care Registered Nurse, MDOC Clinical Services
Sue C. Podruzny, MDOC Programs & Facilities Bureau

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Introduction

On August 3, 2021 the above listed team assessed the Crossroads Correctional Center (Crossroads) Thinking For A Change (T4C) group. The assessment was conducted using the Evidence-based Correctional Program Checklist-Group Assessment (CPC-GA). The objective of this assessment is to conduct a detailed review of the T4C group and to compare the delivery of this intervention with the research literature on best practices in corrections. The following report will provide a summary of the program, procedures used to assess the program, and CPC-GA findings with recommendations aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the Crossroads T4C group.

This assessment is part of a statewide initiative to evaluate the effectiveness of correctional intervention programs/groups offered in our facilities and in the community to ascertain how closely groups meet known principles of effective intervention. In the course of this assessment, staff conducted a review of the Crossroads T4C program and compared its practices with current research findings on best practices in corrections. The following report will provide a summary of the program, procedures used to assess the program, and CPC-GA findings with recommendations aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the service.

This report is not a program evaluation or a contract compliance review. The CPC-GA looks at specific program characteristics and examines the way a program operates to see if it uses evidence-based practices. These are approaches that have been shown by research to reduce the likelihood of new criminal behavior by those who go through the program.

The CPC-GA is based on the premise that the operations within the program provide a safe and secure environment for the offenders.

Description of the Evidence-Based Correctional Program Checklist-Group Assessment (CPC-GA)

The Evidence Based Correctional Program Checklist (CPC) is a tool designed to assess correctional intervention programs.¹ It is used to ascertain how closely correctional programs meet known principles of effective intervention. Several recent studies conducted by the University of Cincinnati on both adult and juvenile programs were used to develop and validate the indicators on the CPC.² These studies yielded strong correlations with outcome between overall scores, domain areas, and individual items, (Holsinger, 1999; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2003, Lowenkamp, 2003; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005a; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005b).

¹ The CPC is modeled after the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory developed by Gendreau and Andrews; however, the CPC includes a number of items not contained in the CPAI. In addition, items that were not found to be positively correlated with recidivism were deleted.

² These studies involved over 40,000 offenders (both adult and juvenile), and over 400 correctional programs, ranging from institutional to community based. All of the studies are available on our web site (www.uc.edu/criminaljustice). A large part of this research involved the identification of program characteristics that were correlated with outcome.

The CPC-GA is a program evaluation tool adapted from the CPC to more closely examine the extent to which correctional group interventions meet the principles of effective intervention. This tool was designed to more closely examine core correctional practices within a group context. Hence, this tool can be used for correctional agencies or contractors that provide a free-standing group to examine the quality of that intervention.

The CPC-GA is divided into two basic areas: capacity and content. The Capacity area is designed to measure whether or not a correctional program has the capability to deliver evidence-based interventions and services for offenders. There are two domains in this area: *1) Program Staff and Support and 2) Quality Assurance.*

The Content area focuses on the substantive aspect of the group and also includes two domains: *Offender Assessment, and 2) Treatment.* The treatment area is designed to measure mostly core correctional practices and is divided into seven components: 1) Group Target and Process; 2) Effective Reinforcement; 3) Effective Disapproval; 4) Structured Skill Building; 5) Relationship Skills; 6) Cognitive Restructuring; and 7) Relapse Prevention.

The CPC-GA tool includes 54 indicators, worth 56 total points. Each area and all domains are scored and rated as either Very High Adherence to EBP (65% to 100%); High Adherence to EBP (55% to 64%); Moderate Adherence to EBP (45% to 54%); or Low Adherence to EBP (less than 45%).

The scores in all domains are then totaled and the same scale is used for the overall assessment score. It should be noted that not all of the domains are given equal weight, and some items may be considered NOT APPLICABLE in which case they are not included in the scoring.

Program Description

Crossroads is a secure residential correctional program for adult males, located in Toole County, Montana. Crossroads has been in existence for 22 years and began exclusively serving State offenders in August 2021. Previously, Crossroads served both Federal and State offenders. Crossroads has capacity for up to 753 offenders, with a population of 741 offenders at the time of the assessment. 2

Crossroads has offered Thinking For Change (T4C) groups for approximately two years. Each T4C group runs for 12 weeks, meeting two times per week for two hours each group. A typical group size is normally between 8-10 offenders, however COVID movement restrictions within the facility have sometimes created smaller numbers of offenders in groups. Currently Crossroads has two staff trained in the T4C curriculum.

Assessment Process

The assessment process consisted of a series of structured interviews with staff members involved with delivery of the T4C group, as well as interviews with program offenders. Interviews took place on August 3, 2021. Relevant program materials were also collected and reviewed. In addition, assessors observed two T4C group sessions. Data from the various sources were used to determine a consensus CPC-GA score and to provide the feedback contained in this report.

FINDINGS

Program Leadership and Development

The first sub-component of this section examines staff qualifications and training, as well as involvement of the program coordinator (i.e. the individual from the host agency responsible for overseeing implementation of the program). Effective programs have adequate oversight by the program coordinator, including selection of staff based on skills and values consistent with offender rehabilitation and use of staff meetings or some other means of direct supervision of the program. Facilitators should be qualified, have adequate training and follow guidelines for ethical program delivery. Finally, the program should be supported by stakeholders.

Program Leadership and Development Strengths:

Todd Mellinger is the Program Supervisor at Crossroads. He oversees the other T4C group facilitator as part of his supervision duties. They also have written ethical guidelines for staff.

As part of Crossroads management, Mr. Mellinger is directly involved in hiring staff, including facilitators for T4C. Staff are selected based on skill, motivation to facilitate and personality type. Staff directly involved in providing programming to offenders meet the education requirement and possess an associate degree or higher. They also meet the experience standards set forth on the CPC-GA.

The Program Manager conducts weekly group facilitator meetings and there are also monthly staff meeting with all mental health treatment staff. While a written agenda is not always followed at each meeting, several topics are covered including; offender issues, case reviews, and facility/population issues raised at the Department-Head meetings.

All facilitators and co-facilitators of the T4C group be formally trained in the curriculum to ensure fidelity to the model for best client outcomes.

Program Leadership and Development Areas in Need of Improvement and Recommendations:

Programs that are effective in reducing recidivism receive ongoing professional training for group facilitators. This component is important for facilitators to continue to hone their skills and education even after receiving their initial training in the curriculum.

- ***Recommendation:*** Crossroads should require ongoing training for professional service delivery staff for approximately 40 hours of training each year on topics such as effective interventions, assessment tools, booster sessions on the curriculum, clinically relevant issues, and/or group process and facilitation skills.

Successful programs experience a high level of support for the treatment offered from their criminal justice stakeholders. Program staff struggled to identify who their stakeholders are. This may be a by-product of the remote way offenders are selected for T4C at Crossroads. Montana State Prison (MSP) treatment staff identify the offenders, and a list is then sent to Crossroads who enrolls the offenders.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should create closer working relationship with stakeholders such as the Board of Pardons and Parole, Institutional Probation and Parole Officers, and even community Treatment and Prerelease programs who all have an interest in the successful operation of the T4C program.

Offender Assessment

The extent to which offenders are appropriate for the services provided and the use of proven assessment methods is critical to effective treatment programs. Effective programs assess the risk, need, and responsivity of offenders, and then provide services and treatment accordingly. The Offender Assessment domain examines the participant selection process and type of offenders targeted for the intervention as well as the assessment of risk, need, and personal characteristics of the offenders.

It should be noted that Crossroads conducts no assessments on offenders prior to placement into the T4C group. This function is completed at Montana State Prison (MSP) who does the MORRA risk and needs assessment and identifies which offenders are appropriate for T4C at Crossroads and next on the waitlist. MSP then sends a list of specific offenders with their DOC #'s to Crossroads who then enrolls the offenders into the T4C group. Specific recommendations for program improvements surrounding Assessments are below and take into consideration this existing workflow which starts at MSP. This workflow may be modified so that Crossroads can increase their adherence to evidence based practices.

Offender Assessment Areas in Need of Improvement and Recommendations:

Effective programs establish criteria for the exclusion of certain types of offenders from group participation to ensure the vast majority of offenders are appropriate for the treatment group. These exclusionary criteria should be written (i.e. a policy) and followed by staff. There should be a match between the services offered by T4C and the presenting problems of the offenders.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop a written policy for what type of offenders are not appropriate for T4C. Staff should know these criteria to ensure offenders in the T4C program are appropriate for the treatment. Implementation of this recommendation may need to be discussed with MSP staff who identify which offenders should receive T4C programming at Crossroads.

Successful programs measure both offender risk and need with a validated, standardized and objective assessment instrument. The MORRA satisfies this requirement.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should review the current MORRA assessment overall score and sub-domain scores and have that information in each offender's T4C file. This information can be obtained from Offender Management Information System 3 (OMIS 3) or provided by MSP staff who identify which offenders should receive T4C programming at Crossroads.

Programs that are effective assess offender responsivity factors by using a validated, standardized and objective instrument. Assessing offender responsivity such as readiness to change, intelligence, maturity, personality, mental disorders and reading level is important to ensure the facilitator is aware of barriers and can customize the delivery of T4C to the offender.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should conduct an assessment for at least two responsivity factors. The TCU Client Self-Rating scale is an example of a validated, standardized and objective assessment. This assessment should be in each offender's T4C file and used by facilitator and treatment staff when making staffing decisions. In the alternatives, Crossroads should check with MSP to see if two responsivity assessments have been completed and if so, obtain copies of the assessments with scores so they can be placed in each offender's file and used by facilitators and treatment staff when making decisions.

Successful programs do not mix low risk and high-risk offenders in the same treatment group. High risk offenders require more dosage than low risk offenders. The groups observed for this assessment were not grouped by risk due to the COVID movement restrictions in the facility at that time. They were instead grouped by housing unit.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should use the MORRA overall score to determine placement into groups. Very High, High, and Moderate risks can be in the same group, but Low risk offenders should be in their own group.

Effective programs target relevant higher need offenders. Making referrals to the T4C group for offenders who score higher in criminal thinking domains ensures the treatment is targeted on the offenders who can benefit the most from treatment.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should use the MORRA domain specific scores to determine placement into the T4C group. Implementation of this recommendation may need to be discussed with MSP staff who identify which offenders should receive T4C programming at Crossroads.

Treatment Characteristics

This domain of the CPC-GA is most extensive. It measures core correctional practices, including the following areas: Group Target and Process, Effective Reinforcement, Effective Disapproval, Structured Skill Building, Relationship Skills, Cognitive Restructuring and Relapse Prevention. Effective correctional interventions use a cognitive behavior approach to target criminogenic behaviors. Furthermore, effective interventions provide structured treatment using effective group practice techniques, including use of good relationship skills. Successful programs also effectively use positive reinforcement and punishment as well as structured skill building and cognitive restructuring to change offender behavior. Finally, the use of relapse prevention strategies designed to assist the offender in anticipating and coping with problem situations should be incorporated.

Treatment Characteristics Strengths:

The T4C program effectively works towards targeting criminogenic needs. During the group session that was observed, offenders worked on the skill of negotiation. The group structure is

set to discuss, role-play and examine other criminogenic needs through other topics and material within the T4C curriculum.

Thinking for a Change is an integrated cognitive behavioral change program developed with the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). It is an evidence-based program designed to enhance an individual's prosocial cognition. It incorporates research from cognitive restructuring theory, social skills development, and the learning and use of problem solving. There are 25 individual lessons covering a wide variety of topics such as: "Active Listening, Giving Feedback, Knowing Your Feelings, Responding to Anger, Problem Solving, and Negotiating.

Groups are always conducted by staff. Each facilitator is knowledgeable about the material covered. Both facilitators were skillful at encouraging all the group members to participate throughout the group process. The facilitator accomplished this by discussing the expectation that all group offenders present an assignment or participate in role play exercises that center on skill building.

Homework is regularly assigned and reviewed as part of the T4C group. Additionally, the homework is expected to be completed on the housing unit prior to entering group. Additionally, the group is structured so that offenders work on the same assignments so they can assist each other if they are struggling to complete their homework.

Group norms were established and followed. Offenders are clear in the group's expectations and group participation. The offenders are aware that each of them must participate during the course of the group and develop role plays to practice the new skill that they learn.

The group size is typically 8-10 offenders, but one group was observed with only 2 offenders due to COVID restrictions implemented to keep different housing units separated in an effort to limit the spread of COVID within the facility the day of this assessment. Group size is appropriate for one facilitator and easily managed.

Both facilitators were skilled with delivering the material while maintaining a good rapport with offenders. There was friendly banter, good natured humor, and genuine interest between the facilitators and the offenders. The group facilitator also has a nice mix of facilitation skills, i.e., high degree of interest for the topic material and ability to manage and stay on task.

Both facilitators demonstrated authority with the group, commanding respect in a quiet, non-authoritarian way. Both did a nice job with directing or guiding the group to stay on task.

There were several tools used during the group session observed to assist the offenders with identifying their underlying attitudes, values and beliefs. Staff teaching the negotiation skill keenly pointed out that successful negotiation builds on previous skill learned in the curriculum, listening, asking questions, knowing your feelings and understanding the feelings of others. This successfully demonstrated for offenders that they were building on previously practiced skills. Because facilitators follow the T4C manual, there are numerous opportunities for offenders to identify their underlying thoughts and values as well as many opportunities for offenders to be taught how to replace their anti-social thoughts with new pro-social thinking patterns.

Treatment Characteristics Areas in Need of Improvement and Recommendations:

T4C groups regularly begin on time but do not last the entire time allotted. Effective programs fully utilize the length of group as outlined in the manual to ensure offenders are receiving the appropriate amount of dosage.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should ensure all T4C groups meet for the allotted time. If all material of the session is covered, additional role play between offenders or modeling by the facilitator can be presented.

T4C groups at Crossroads are not currently staffed by two facilitators in a co-facilitating manner. The T4C curriculum is designed for two facilitators to deliver each group session. Instead, each facilitator conducts their own groups.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should have more trained T4C facilitators if adjustments to the current facilitator's work schedules cannot be made to accommodate this recommendation. When co-facilitating, both staff should be active and engaged in the group.

Effective programs offer enough dosage hours to affect change in the target behavior. Because the T4C groups do not run for the entire time allotted, there is no way to achieve the 54 to 65 hours required to affect change. If the 25 sessions were to run for the full two hours every session, the total dosage for T4C would only be 50 hours.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should ensure the T4C treatment provides offenders with the required number of hours by ensuring all sessions run for the full time allotted. Additional sessions should be required for aftercare or to provide booster sessions focused on advanced practice of skills to meet the minimum dosage of 54 to 65 hours.

Successful programs consistently follow the curriculum manual. The T4C curriculum manual includes exercises, activities and homework assignments, which were used throughout the course of the group session. However, as noted above, this manual is not followed because group is not consistently co-facilitated by two facilitators.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should ensure the T4C groups are delivered as the manual requires. It should be noted that an offender "porter" helps with moving equipment and handling visual aids used by the facilitator. Group observation and interviews with offenders indicated this porter did not co-facilitate group. Crossroads should be vigilant about the role of the offender porter in groups to ensure there is no appearance of offender co-facilitation.

Effective programs have facilitators who address different learning styles or barriers of the offenders being served. For example, offenders who struggle with language barriers could be given time to clearly explain themselves and work through the skills being taught in the group.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should incorporate the responsivity assessments into the delivery of the material presented to offenders in the T4C group. The facilitator should ensure all group members understand these barriers and emphasize the importance to work as a group to learn the skills together. Knowing specific responsivity issues allows the facilitator to break down concepts for each offender so they are easily understandable.

Effective programs use a variety of reinforcers or rewards to support offenders practicing and using pro-social or positive behavior within the confines of the group sessions. Using only verbal praise does not provide the needed variety.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop and implement a list of positive reinforcers that can be used by group facilitators. Examples include earning additional privileges, advancement on level systems, points/tokens redeemable for tangible rewards, graduation ceremonies with probation officers, judges or family members included, and/or certificates of completion.

Effective programs deliver reinforcers/rewards to offenders in a way that maximizes the reward. Programs should always deliver more rewards than punishers and all rewards should immediately follow desired behavior with an explanation about why the reward is being administered. Lastly, the reward should clearly be tied to the pro-social behavior.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop a policy on the effective use of reinforcers/rewards by facilitators that address the required following components; 1) ratio of more rewards to punishers, 2) reinforcers/rewards applied immediately after the desired behavior, 3) that facilitators provide an explanation about why their behavior was appropriate, and 4) that rewards are only given to offenders who perform the desired behavior (not to the whole group).

Successful programs use effective disapproval and punishers to extinguish antisocial expressions and promote behavior change by showing offenders that behavior has consequences. Just as a single reward is not enough to change behavior, a range of punishers is also needed for facilitators to draw from. Facilitators should make all attempts to deal with inappropriate behaviors as they arise.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop and implement a list of appropriate punishers that can be used by group facilitators. Examples include verbal disapproval, response cost - loss of privileges/points/levels, or extra homework. As a last resort, if an offender is disruptive, they should be removed from the group, but follow up conversation about the disruptive behavior should be discussed at a team meeting. Conversations center on the behavior that was displayed and what social skills the offender can use in the future to avoid consequential behavior. The offender could then be asked to practice several social skills within a certain time frame, i.e., before the next canteen date. Shaming techniques should never be used.

Effective programs deliver punishers to offenders in a way that the offender fully understands the problem behavior and why it needs to change. Facilitators should always recognize the antisocial expression, respond appropriately to non-compliance, be consistent in the application of punishers, provide a clear explanation of why the punisher is being delivered, ensure the punisher is delivered with an intensity to extinguish the antisocial behavior, that punishments are immediately terminated after the offender corrects the behavior, and that the facilitator can recognize and deal with any negative effects of the punisher.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop a policy on the effective application of punishers by facilitators to address the required following components; 1) the recognition of inappropriate responses and expressions, 2) consistent application of punishers and that antisocial behaviors are not ignored, 3) non-compliance such as being late for group,

interrupting, not doing homework is responded to appropriately (e.g. not administering a punishment to the entire group), 4) explanation about why a punisher is being administered and why their behavior was inappropriate, 5) the amount of punisher is sufficient to extinguish the behavior but does not exceed an appropriate amount, 6) that the punisher is immediately terminated once the behavior is corrected, 7) any negative effects of a punisher is addressed by the facilitator (specific training may be needed so facilitators can identify these unwanted negative effects of punishers).

Successful programs teach an alternative to the inappropriate behavior after a punisher is administered. For example, a facilitator may demonstrate an appropriate coping response to the problem issue. This is effective use of modeling.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should ensure all punishers are followed by teaching or modeling the appropriate response or skill to offenders.

Effective programs build on the basic teaching of skills by offering structured skill building to offenders. There are specific components of structured skill building that are outlined below. Facilitators should model prosocial skills and explain the benefits of learning new skills. Modeling new skills through demonstration is a current component of the T4C program. However, new skills should be sold to offenders in a way they understand the advantages of learning new skills and the benefits they will receive from using them.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should spend additional time in the T4C group in explaining the benefits of learning new skills in addition to the existing modeling done by the facilitator.

Facilitators should add specific corrective feedback to the existing skills practice done by offenders in the T4C group. All group offenders had the opportunity to practice a new skill within the group setting. Facilitators should provide specific feedback to offenders on adherence to the steps required to practice the skill.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should ensure facilitators are providing corrective feedback on every step when offenders are practicing new skills. If an offender did the roleplay incorrectly and/or left out missing pieces, the facilitator should constructively provide corrective feedback and request the participant try it again. Facilitators should ensure that practice time with corrective feedback takes up just under half the time of a group session.

Facilitators should encourage offenders to practice new skill with an increased level of difficulty. This graduated skills practice with constructive feedback is necessary to ensure offenders are improving their skills.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should incorporate graduated skills practice in the existing T4C group and that all offenders are offered sufficient time for practice new skills in increasingly difficult situations or that a separate advanced practice group is offered.

Effective programs spend time within the group sessions to develop risk or relapse prevention plans that have techniques offenders can rehearse. This more comprehensive relapse prevention plan should be developed by the end of the treatment group that ties in directly with the new

learning and skill acquisition for each participant. This helps to ensure that offenders are able to recognize high-risk situations that lead to law-breaking behavior and allows them to have a concrete plan that incorporates the skills taught throughout the program to deal with these situations.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop individualized relapse prevention plans for each T4C offender that include strategies and scripts for responding to risky situations, people, and places. Offenders should be given the opportunity to plan and rehearse the techniques in the relapse prevention plan.

Quality Assurance

This CPC-GA domain centers on the quality assurance and evaluation process used to monitor how well the group is functioning. Effective programs should include regular group observation with feedback. Likewise, offender input should be solicited via satisfaction surveys and pre-post testing should be used to measure offender behavior change. Finally, completion criteria should be behaviorally based and discharge summaries developed to review program progress and unmet needs.

Quality Assurance Strengths:

Crossroads has implemented a system whereby Mr. Mellinger observes the T4C group and provides feedback to the other facilitator. Facilitator's service delivery skills are evaluated. Group observation is important in that it ensures fidelity, provides support to group facilitators and can be incorporated into annual reviews/evaluations.

Quality Assurance Areas in Need of Improvement and Recommendations:

Successful programs regularly seek feedback from offenders about their satisfaction with the group.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop and implement an exit survey/interview or post-release survey which solicits feedback from offenders and that this feedback is considered when refining the delivery of T4C.

Effective programs measure the extent of offender behavior change of target behaviors by conducting pre and post testing. This is an objective way to measure behavior change and the effectiveness of the T4C curriculum as opposed to subjective measurements by staff.

- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should develop a process by which offenders are assessed at the beginning (a pre-test) and again at the end (a post-test) on target behaviors. An example of a target behavior could be motivation and an assessment that could be used for that behavior is the URICA.

Programs that reduce recidivism have clearly outlined completion criteria which include objective indicators of what is needed to obtain a certificate of completion. Facilitators complete a Group Participation Summary checklist, but this alone does not meet this standard.

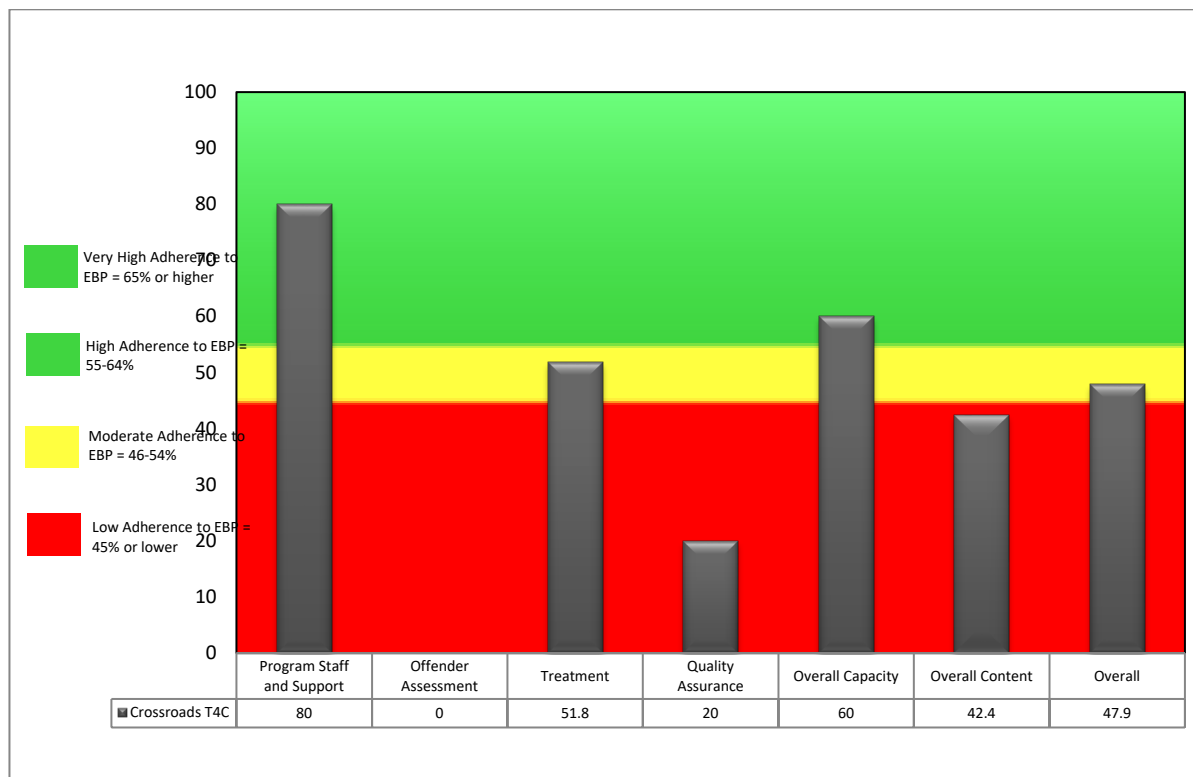
- **Recommendation:** Crossroads should use a behavioral assessment instrument or detailed treatment plans that include measurable objectives as a way to measure an offender’s progress in acquiring pro-social behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs while in the program. , including objective indicators of what is needed to earn a certificate of completion.

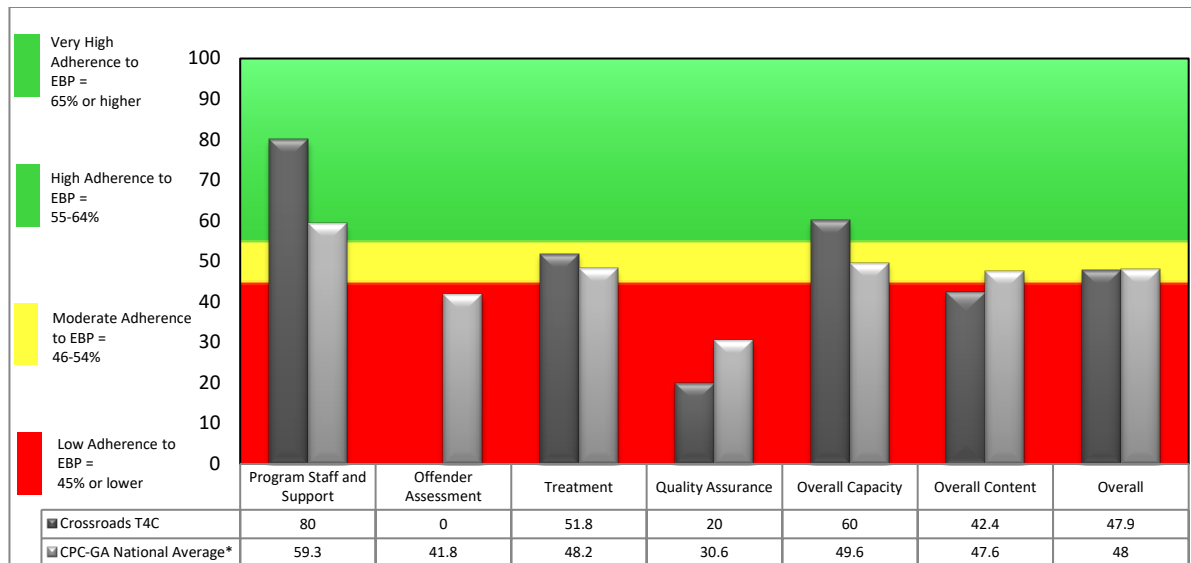
Successful programs develop formal discharge summaries for each offender upon completion of the group.

- **Recommendation:** Formal discharge summaries should be constructed on each participant completing the group. These should include such things as progress in meeting target behaviors/goals, recommendations for continued areas of need, pre-post test results, and number of sessions completed.

OVERALL PROGRAM RATING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Crossroads T4C received an overall score of 54.1 percent on the CPC-GA. This falls into the Moderate Adherence to EBP range on the CPC-GA. The overall Capacity score designed to measure whether the program has the *capability* to deliver evidence-based interventions and services for offenders is 73.3 percent, which falls into the Very High Adherence category. The overall Content score, which focuses on the *substantive* domains of assessment and treatment, is 45.4 percent, which falls just on the cusp between Low Adherence and Moderate Adherence categories.





Conclusion

Crossroads' T4C scored well on the CPC-GA and has many strength areas as listed in this assessment. Recommendations for areas that could be improved have been made in several CPC-GA domains. These recommendations should assist Crossroads in making future changes to increase program effectiveness.

Programs that find the assessment process most useful are those that prioritize need areas and develop action plans to systematically address such needs. Once the program has had sufficient time to implement changes, it is often helpful to have the program re-assessed to determine whether the program has been successful at either sustaining the great work currently being done or implementing recommended changes.

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