

ACEA CONFERENCE PAPER

THE EDUCATION PROFILE INTERVIEW (EPI)

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DARWIN, NT - OCTOBER 2005

INTRODUCTION

My name is Colleen Henry and I work as Acting Senior Correctional Education Officer at Long Bay Hospital 2 (LBH2), one of six autonomous centres within the Long Bay complex located at Malabar, near the shores of Botany Bay in Sydney. This centre caters for around 315 offenders in 3 separate wings who are generally housed here for medical reasons. My role is to oversee the Education Unit which comes under the Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute (AEVTI), a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) within the NSW Department of Corrective Services. A major part of my role is to ensure compliance with The National Training Framework embodying The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Part of this compliance requires that the RTO identifies, negotiates, plans and implements appropriate learning and assessment strategies to meet the needs of each of its clients. It was against this background that AEVTI initiated the development of a standardised information-gathering tool, known as the Education Profile Interview (EPI), for use by all NSW correctional educators. In this paper I will be discussing the implementation of the EPI, its ongoing role in the educational process, and I will be presenting a brief analysis of information gathered from a sample of 126 EPIs conducted at LBH2.

BACKGROUND

At the IFECISA Conference held in Bathurst in 2001, international guest speakers Drs Steve Steurer and Tony Fabelo presented papers establishing that literacy intervention directly affected offender recidivism rates in the United States.

While it is generally accepted that results of studies can be extrapolated to other western countries, there was also a consensus that similar studies should be undertaken in New South Wales to provide a strong evidence base for educational

interventions. And so, in 2004, following trials and changes resulting from feedback offered by field staff, the Education Profile Interview (EPI) was implemented at all correctional centres throughout New South Wales.

At LBH2, there are often situations where we don't have access to offenders because of staff shortages. While shortages occur in most centres, this is exacerbated in my centre because correctional staff are required for medical escorts (taking offenders to hospital), and this happens regularly. Sometimes we are closed for the whole day, or we might be open in the morning and closed in the afternoon (or vice versa). The reason for this is that there is a requirement that we have *two* correctional officers on duty in our area, and there may not be enough staff for that.

When these lock-ins occur, we have managed to get around the system by arranging for offenders to attend at the area where the Deputy Governor's office is located. This area is always manned by correctional officers (such as the Deputy's Clerk). There are several interview rooms (usually utilised by legal visits) which can also be used by Education staff who can interview an offender while inputting the information directly into a laptop. Another way around these staff shortages has been to conduct EPIs through the wire fence. This means that when the gate to the Education area is locked, the teachers can stand at the fence and complete the form by hand in that setting. (Of course, in summer, they need to wear a hat.)

THE EDUCATION PROFILE INTERVIEW (EPI)

The EPI (see attached) is a five-page questionnaire intended to be completed for all incarcerated offenders throughout the state at an interview conducted by Education personnel. It forms the basis of the first contact between offenders and Education staff, and as such, it is NOT intended that it should be handed to offenders to complete by themselves. AEVTI Head Office determined that an EPI should be

conducted for every incarcerated offender, and consequently, at LBH2, electronic systems were set up to comply with this requirement.

The purpose of the EPI is:

- * to determine educational needs
- * to indicate which offenders require further in-depth assessment
- * to identify specific target groups (eg NESB, Aboriginal etc)
- * to plan educational provision within individual centres; and
- * to provide the initial information for longitudinal studies

As well as gathering data on an offender's education and employment history, goals, aptitudes and interests, it also marks the beginning of an ongoing relationship between students and education staff.

The EPI is divided into the following main sections:

- * personal information (date and place of birth, nationality including Aboriginality, and whether the person has a disability)
- * sentencing information
- * educational background
- * pre-custody employment history and post-custody employment plans
- * educational case plan

IMPLEMENTING THE EPI AT LBH2

The first EPIs were conducted at this Centre in August 2004, and since then we have averaged 25 a month. The 126 individual EPIs that form the sample used for this paper were chosen by date - ie, all EPIs completed between January and June 2005.

Once an EPI is completed, a copy is placed on the AEVTI file and another copy on the offender's case file. At the same time, enrolment forms for in-house

courses (not distance education) are given to the relevant teachers for follow up. EPIs are emailed on to the next centre when an offender is moved. At the end of each month, all EPIs completed during that month are emailed to AEVTI Head Office and from this information, a list of all EPIs completed statewide is sent out to the field so that staff can check to see if an EPI has already been done. This can cut down on duplications.

Analysis of the results from the 126 EPIs used for this paper is attached.

Some of the more interesting results follow. Of those interviewed:

Aborigines make up 22%

NESB make up 27%

Young Offenders make up 26%

Offenders with a disability make up 41%

The high number of offenders in this last category should probably be attributed to the fact that these results have been taken from Long Bay Hospital 2, where most offenders are attending medical appointments.

A large number (37%) stated that their level of reading and writing limited what they could do, while 15% said they had attended a special school or a special class at school. 72% did not progress past Year 9, while at the other end, only 7% attended university.

LOCAL PLANNING OF BROAD EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

The EPI identifies areas of post-release employment. As a result of this current research, it has been shown that 'Building' is the most popular area of post-release employment amongst offenders at LBH2. Many offenders say that they enjoy working outdoors, so this result is not surprising. Negotiations will be undertaken

with TAFE in the near future to determine whether it is viable for this type of course to be conducted at this centre, as it has been in other centres.

CASE STUDIES

Following are three case studies demonstrating how the EPI can contribute to effective case planning and throughcare by providing a comprehensive basis for individual programs.

Case Study 1

Offender One was interviewed by Education in October 2004 and an EPI was completed. Offender One was a young adult offender who had completed Year 11 and then undertook a 6-month automotive course. He was serving a comparatively short sentence of 6 months. At the time of his arrest, he was working as a furniture removalist. He had also worked in two other occupations: automotive dismantling and unloading of containers.

Between his initial interview and his release, Offender One participated in a pilot program through OTEN (the distance education arm of TAFE), and successfully completed Certificate I Access Options. He stated at the time of his EPI that he was very keen to get into Accountancy. Because his release was imminent and also because he said he had a home computer, the Senior Correctional Education Officer made a decision to enrol him in the Accounting Procedures course through OTEN prior to his release. This throughcare initiative meant that Offender One would have a 'head start' for his goal of enrolling at his local TAFE when enrolments opened in the new year.

Case Study 2

Offender Two has very little English and consequently, an EPI was conducted with the assistance of an interpreter. Offender Two stated that he had completed the

equivalent of Year 10 in his own country and subsequently worked for 5 years as a construction labourer, and then for 3 months here in Australia in the same occupation. While he is a deportee, the EPI still identified that his case plan should include English classes.

Offender Two is now regularly attending English as a Second Language classes with our qualified teacher at LBH2, working on basic exercises such as giving personal information, telling the time, and learning the days of the week. His teacher reports that he is working well and completing homework exercises.

Case Study 3

When Offender Three underwent his Education Profile Interview, he stated that he had completed Year 10 over 25 years ago and then went on to complete a sheet metal worker apprenticeship. He has many certificates for courses completed when he was incarcerated on a previous sentence. Offender Three has worked for 15 years employing others. He had completed some modules of a small business management course in the past, and stated that he would like to continue these studies and gain a formal business management qualification. As LBH2 does not offer any business courses, Offender Three was enrolled through OTEN in Cert IV in Business Management at the beginning of this year. He is progressing well and sending assignments off regularly. As can be seen, distance education is a valuable adjunct to education offered on site.

CONCLUSION

At this stage, there is no provision for a statewide analysis of the information gained through the EPI. This is because the EPI is still in its infancy and to carry out research, such as the American study, into relationships between educational background and recidivism rates would be certainly premature. However, the

implementation of the EPI is the first step in the information gathering process that will later form the basis for correctional education research in New South Wales. We may then be in a position to conduct our own studies similar to the three-state study conducted in the United States prior to the 2001 IFECSA conference.

In conclusion, the EPI has now become an integral part of educational delivery in New South Wales' correctional centres. It not only forms a strong basis for educational case planning for individual offenders, highlighting their educational needs; it also guides them towards educational achievements in preparation for release back into the community.