

## Understanding Evidence-Based Practice

By Pamela F. Rodriguez,  
TASC Executive Vice President

This issue of *TASC News & Views* is dedicated to the concept of evidence-based practice (EBP) and how we apply it at TASC.

The concept of evidence-based practice is not new. It is simply the current terminology for putting into practice what science has proven to be effective. It is about learning what works and applying it in the real world, in a way that is as faithful as possible to what research has proven.

EBP is about monitoring and evaluating program outcomes and delivery processes, analyzing whether this is making a difference in people's lives, and making adjustments to improve and enhance outcomes. It is about training, so that clinical services are administered effectively and consistently. It is about innovation, efficiency, fiscal responsibility, and ongoing communication—with partners, stakeholders, and researchers—about what works and what does not. It is about continuing to push for better results.

We are particularly pleased to include in this issue the expertise of Dr. Harry K. Wexler, senior principal investigator for National Development & Research Institutes, Inc. Dr. Wexler is a nationally recognized expert on

this topic and a leader in substance abuse policy, treatment, and research.

In the article on page 2, Dr. Wexler explains the difference between research efficacy and clinical effectiveness. These distinctions are important in understanding the

EBP is one element of providing effective and meaningful services. It is effort that occurs in a world that is variable and changing and with individuals who also are variable and changing.

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- Pamela F. Rodriguez, TASC Executive Vice President

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limitations of too narrow a definition of EBP. Some practices, though tested under the most rigorous research designs, may not translate seamlessly to a real-world setting. Such practices might prove too difficult to implement or too costly for the funding available. Others may be unable to translate from one setting to another or may not be meaningful to the racial, ethnic, or cultural group involved.

The bottom line is that EBP has to work in the real world. Sometimes this may mean combining various pieces of evidence-based practice, such as what occurs in Illinois' nationally recognized Sheridan program model. Sometimes it may mean applying good clinical judgment or trying new things that are based in research theory but perhaps not yet formally tested.

Are there practices that work and have been proven to be more effective than others? Absolutely. However, it is also important to recognize that there is no perfect remedy for helping someone to overcome years of traumatic experiences, addiction, and poverty. Different people are motivated by different factors. The factors that go into human behavior are innumerable, and include environmental influences, timing, biology, brain chemistry, social environment, peer influences, and intangible factors such as faith and luck. Though our work is not an exact science, science is required.

And so, as we embrace the EBP of today, it is important to do so with a balanced and interactive approach—an approach where the best of science helps to drive practice and the best of practice helps to drive science.

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**TASC, Inc.** (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities) is an independent, statewide, nonprofit agency that advocates for people in need of drug treatment and other rehabilitative services. We work in partnership with Illinois courts, prisons, child welfare programs, and community-based service providers to help adults and youth get the help they need to rebuild their lives. Please visit us online at [www.tasc.org](http://www.tasc.org).













# TASC

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## TASC Plays Role in Local Publisher's Success

Nearly 15 years ago, Isaac Lewis, Jr. was given a second chance at life. He received probation and TASC instead of prison for his drug-related offenses.

"I was homeless, incarcerated, and my family had lost all faith in me," said Lewis. "TASC, probation, and the other social service agencies gave me the guidance and help I needed to recover.

"My TASC case manager made sure I went to my 12-step meetings and wasn't using. Being held accountable for my time and actions helped me to take control of my life."

And Lewis did just that.

Lewis took courses to learn how to run a business, wrote a business plan and grant proposal, and obtained

more than \$29,000 from the North Lawndale Small Grants Initiative and the Steans Family Foundation to create and publish the North Lawndale Community News (NLCN). NLCN offers positive, uplifting, and informative news and provides employment resources to local residents.

"I take the philosophy that no man is an island. No community is an island," said Lewis. "Just as I received help and support, I make sure to give help and support. You have to help your neighbor."

Now, Lewis manages four staff and 125 resident, freelance writers. The newspaper's distribution has expanded to include the South Lawndale, Austin, East and West Garfield,



Isaac Lewis, Jr. is the publisher and CEO of North Lawndale Community News newspaper.

Humboldt Park, and Near Westside communities, and circulation has tripled since its inception in 1999 (from 5,000 to 15,000).

"Having faith in God and taking advantage of the help and support offered by TASC and others, I was able to make better choices and create a tool that helps others," said Lewis. "Now the North Lawndale community and those all around us are more connected."

To learn more about Isaac Lewis and NLCN, visit [www.nlcn.org](http://www.nlcn.org).

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