

Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System: Practical Considerations

There is a growing recognition that youth involved in the juvenile justice system represent one of the most vulnerable populations in the United States. This concern is heightened by the harsh fact that youth with disabilities are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, as well as in all other categories of high risk youth. Sadly, youth – with and without disabilities – who become entangled in juvenile justice generally have poor transition outcomes related to reintegration and recidivism. Helping these youth pave the road to a more promising future presents major challenges for the varied adults charged with their care as well as the youth themselves.

One important step to helping these youth is to develop a better understanding of how and why they become involved in the juvenile justice system, and some of the major obstacles that stand in the way of their successful transition into adulthood and economic self-sufficiency. Research and practice suggest that by addressing these youth's specific developmental needs and the involvement of caring adults can substantially increase the likelihood that former youth offenders, with and without disabilities, will complete their education, become employed, and ultimately become productive members of society. Therefore, helping youth avoid or

*This InfoBrief describes the characteristics of and issues faced by youth involved with the juvenile justice system, including those with disabilities. It provides a framework for youth service professionals to help these youth avoid or transition out of the juvenile justice system, promotes cross-systems collaboration, and highlights promising practices currently being implemented around the country. This InfoBrief is based on **Making the Right Turn: A Guide about Improving Transition Outcomes for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System**, available at: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/juvenile-justice-guide> www.ncwd-youth.info.*

successfully transition from the juvenile justice system calls for a crucial collaboration between the various sectors that intersect before, during, and after each youth's involvement, including juvenile justice, education, workforce development, mental health, housing, other community institutions, youth, and their families. Promising practices for

youth service professionals and policymakers have emerged from research, current Federal law, and the various sectors themselves.

Understanding the Youth Involved

Increasing your understanding of the facts and the disability-related characteristics of youth involved in the juvenile justice system is vital to effectively serve these youth. Among the alarming data:

- Approximately 144,000 delinquency cases per year result in youth being committed to out-of-home placement, representing an increase of 44 percent over the last 20 years.
- On average across states, over one third of these youth are provided special education services due to the existence of a disability and the percentage ranges from 9.1 percent to 77.5 percent. While the rates of students with disabilities in corrections are hindered by inadequate child-find procedures, it is generally believed that the rates greatly exceed the typical 9.1 percent of youth with disabilities (ages 6-17) in public schools.
- The most highly represented percentage of students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system are youth with emotional distur-





bance (ED) or learning disabilities (LD), comprising over 47.4 percent and 38.6 percent of students in secure care respectively.

- The typically poor outcomes related to reintegration and recidivism of these youth, with and without disabilities, are estimated to cost society \$1.5 million for each person who begins criminal activity as a youth and continues throughout life.

Youth with ED are by far the most highly represented students with disabilities in juvenile justice, comprising over 47.4 percent of students in secure care, compared to only about eight percent within public schools. In order to effectively serve youth with ED currently in the juvenile justice system, as well as avoid more of these youth becoming involved in the future, we must look at the contributing factors including disability-related characteristics, such as school failure, post-school outcomes, and co-occurring mental-health issues.

Many disability-related characteristics have significant implications for youth in the juvenile justice system.

For example, a high percentage of youth with ED have language disorders; nearly one-third of adolescents with ED have difficulty understanding what others say to them and adolescents with ED are lower functioning in social skills, including self-control, assertion, and cooperation. As a result, youth with disabilities have difficulties communicating with their lawyers; are also more likely to plead guilty and be committed; are less likely to have their sentences appealed, to be placed on probation, or to be placed in diversionary programs; and frequently serve longer sentences than youth without disabilities convicted of the same crimes.

Youth with ED experience the most school failure and negative post-school outcomes. While in school, youth with ED have poor academic and social outcomes. Fifty-eight percent of students with ED perform below grade level in reading and 93 percent are below grade level in math, both of which are strong predictors of dropping out of school. They typically earn lower grades and fail more courses than youth in any other disability category; experience a high degree of disciplinary actions; and have been suspended or expelled at a rate four times that of students with other disabilities and non-disabled peers. In a seven-year study of youth with ED from residential schools, 43.3% were arrested at least once and 34.4% were adjudicated. Over 64% of students with ED exit high school without a regular diploma. Once out of school, the results are even more discouraging. Youth who drop out of school are 72% more likely to be unemployed and 3 times as likely to live in poverty as those with diplomas. Sadly, youth with ED commonly have longer delays before obtaining employment, have lower employment rates, and earn even less than their peers with and without disabilities. Educational failure and unemployment are both factors that contribute to law-violating behavior. About 70 percent of youth with ED will be arrested within three years of leaving school.

Students with ED frequently face a myriad of mental health needs which may be associated with their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system, ranging from depression and anxiety, increased problems with drug abuse, lack of social skills, mental disorders, and abuse and neglect. Reports indicate that 45% of youth with ED in public schools receive substance abuse

services – this mirrors the fact that nearly half of confined youth have a substance abuse disorder. Youth with ED tend to be lower functioning on measures of social skills, such as interpersonal problem-solving and impulse control, making them 2.3 times as likely to be arrested. National studies indicate that youth with ED experience higher incidence of abuse and neglect, making them six to seven times more likely to be arrested for delinquent acts than youth in the general population. Up until now, the link between youth with disabilities and mental health needs in juvenile justice has not been extensively studied, which may be due, in part, to the differing definitions of emotional disturbance between the fields of psychiatry and education. For example, while the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) definition of ED excludes youth with social maladjustment, social maladjustment is commonly equated with oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder in the psychiatry field. In juvenile justice, over half of the youth have oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder.

In other words, youth with disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system may be faced with a complex combination of incarceration, academic difficulties, and mental disorders. If not adequately recognized and addressed, these difficulties will likely inhibit a youth's engagement in school, the community, and workforce. Therefore, it is essential that adults with responsibility for these youth (e.g., families, police, judges, attorneys, secure care professionals, educators and administrators, social service professionals, and other advocates) have the knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as the professional and political will, to do what is



necessary to address their unique needs.

Understanding the Stages of Youth Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System—and Possible Ways to Improve Outcomes

Collaboration across systems and between organizations is the key to improving the treatment of youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system—and opportunities for cross systems collaboration exist at each stage of the juvenile justice process:

Prevention/Early Intervention

Prior to arrest, it is critical that professionals across child welfare, social service agencies, mental health, special education, workforce development, and community programs coordinate services and work with families, targeting youth with high incidence disabilities such as ED. Early identification and support of at-risk youth can help lower the odds of their being incarcerated.

Initial Problem Behavior: Initial Law Enforcement or Non-Law Enforcement Involvement

Generally, law enforcement agencies make the decision whether to send a matter into the juvenile justice system or divert the youth to alternative programs. Youth with disabilities may exhibit socially inappropriate behavior, have difficulty understanding their rights, and are less likely to be considered for alternative programs. In fact, although inappropriate, detention and incarceration in juvenile justice may be seen as a way of providing mental health services that may be otherwise unavailable. The use of specially trained officers, working in collaboration with mental health professionals within the police department, as well as collaboration

between the police and a mental health crisis team are important strategies for making valid decisions regarding referral of youth with ED. In addition, police may find that parents can provide important information when a youth is arrested, and although professionals may encounter difficulties engaging parents, research has shown clear benefits from involving them at all points in the process.

Diversion

Diversion, which is defined as “an attempt to divert, or channel out, youthful offenders from the juvenile justice system” is an option at several junctures during the processing of a delinquency case. It can be considered for nonviolent youthful offenders, particularly those less likely to reoffend and most likely to attend mandatory meetings; and, it is an important option especially for youth classified as special education and those with identified mental health needs. Alternatively, for youth with ED and/or other mental health needs, incarceration presents potential risks including victimization, self-injury, and suicide. Maintaining youth in the community with appropriate supports (e.g., family and individual counseling, school-based interventions, behavioral and social skills interventions) allows them to work toward post-school self-sufficiency.

Prosecution

At the prosecution stage, the decision can be made to divert the youth from the juvenile justice system, or continue to juvenile court intake where youth may be waived from the criminal justice system via statutory discretion or prosecutorial discretion. Between 1992 and 1997, laws were passed in 45 states that made it easier to transfer juvenile cases to criminal court.

Intake and Detention

Typically, court intake is done by an intake officer and is designed to decide to dismiss the case, to handle the matter informally, or to request formal intervention by the juvenile court. Youth with disabilities may have difficulties understanding questions at intake and inadvertently provide inaccurate information. They are more likely to have behavioral violations and be placed in segregation, are detained more often and may be detained for longer periods of time while awaiting assessments or specialized placements. Ongoing collaboration and communication among special educators, custody staff, mental health professionals, and parents during intake and confinement can help minimize these issues and can assist the youth by ensuring that appropriate supports are in place.

Formal Processing and Judicial Waiver

At a detention hearing, the juvenile court judge may decide that a youth needs further detention or the case may be dismissed. The judge also has the authority in some instances to waive juvenile court jurisdiction and transfer the case to criminal court. If these transferred cases result in the youth's conviction in a criminal court, they are more likely to recidivate and learn new ways of offending in adult facilities. In addition, they are five times more likely to report being a victim of rape, compared to youth in juvenile detention. The Task Force on Community Preventative Services concluded that transferring youth to criminal court was harmful to youth and found no preventative effects for youth violence.

Adjudication and Disposition

Adjudication is the formal procedure where a judge decides whether a youth



is delinquent and, if so, develops a disposition plan. At the dispositional hearing, recommendations are presented to the judge, who may order residential placement or other combinations of programs, including supervised probations, drug or other counseling, restitution, and other confinement configurations (e.g., weekends). Youth with disabilities may attend without understanding the proceedings and can “appear hostile, impulsive, unconcerned, or respond inappropriately to questions.” To make appropriate decisions concerning youth adjudication and disposition, adults who have an understanding of disabilities and mental disorders must be available to advocate for the needs of youth prior to and during hearings. Including parents in post-adjudicatory interventions significantly lowers recidivism. A comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach to decision-making is required throughout the juvenile justice process.

Alternative Sentencing

Minority youth and youth with disabilities are provided less access to alternative sentencing, such as probation, restitution, and community service. Key youth advocates — including educators, child welfare, mental health, youth development, social service agencies and parents — are required to explore and provide the most appropriate placement and continued progress.

Confinement

Youth with disabilities who are adjudicated delinquent and placed in a secure care facility do not typically receive educational services. Very few correctional facilities have formal vocational education programs that provide offenders with marketable skills and assistance in employment planning. Even when vocational

programs do exist, they often exclude youth with disabilities because they do not have a high school diploma, adequate reading skills, or other prerequisite skills. Throughout confinement, key support personnel must continue to collaborate and communicate to ensure that the youth’s education and mental health needs are considered, their rights are maintained, and that they gain workplace skills.

Meeting the Needs of Youth in Juvenile Justice

A framework, *Guideposts for Success for Transition Age Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System (Juvenile Justice Guideposts)* has been designed to assist the multiple organizations that need to be involved to meet the needs and improve the transition outcomes of youth involved with the juvenile justice system and to create the necessary community “webs of support.”

The *Juvenile Justice Guideposts* is based on the *Guideposts for Success*, which details what research says all youth, including youth with disabilities, need from a developmental perspective to successfully transition to adulthood. An increased understanding of the unique needs of this particular population of young people, combined with an enhanced level of coordination among the court and justice systems, education, workforce, child welfare systems, and mental health systems can help decrease recidivism and increase the likelihood that these youth will become productive adult members of our society. Built on 30 years of research and experience, the *Guideposts’* comprehensive framework identifies five core areas across disciplines, programs, and institutional settings and points out that all youth, particularly at-risk youth (e.g., youth with mental health needs and other disabilities), achieve better outcomes

when they have access to:

- school-based preparatory experiences;
- career-preparation and work-based experiences;
- youth development and leadership opportunities;
- connecting activities (support and community services); and
- family involvement and supports

For each of the five transition areas, the *Juvenile Justice Guideposts* (See Table 1) identifies the specific needs of all youth, including youth with disabilities, and then lists some additional needs that youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system may have. By utilizing a strength-based approach to address the specific developmental needs of this population, caring adults (e.g., policymakers, program administrators, judges, court personnel, secure staff, corrections professionals, youth service professionals, parents, family members) can substantially increase the likelihood that former youth offenders will become productive contributing members of society. Key components of this framework for success are emerging in an array of communities around the country.

Promising Practices for Practitioners

While it is possible to identify effective interventions for both youth already involved and at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system, relatively few studies have been conducted, and, additionally, study results may not be analyzed separately for youth with disabilities or youth with specific disabilities, such as ED. Despite these limitations, important conclusions and

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Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<p>School-Based Preparatory Experiences</p> <p>1</p>	<p>In order to perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. These should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic programs that are based on clear state standards; • career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards; • curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work and community-based learning experiences; • learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary; • supports from and by highly qualified staff; • access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures; and, • graduation standards that include options. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and use strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling; • have access to specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school; • develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and. • be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability of quality educational, vocational, and GED programs; • access to additional academic and behavioral support that relies on research-based techniques; • teachers, administrators, and secure care professionals in juvenile correctional facilities that collaborate to promote youth access to a free and appropriate public education; • conditions in juvenile correctional facilities, and throughout the juvenile justice process that foster enrollment in education, alternative education, special education, vocational, pre-GED and GED programs, and post-secondary education based on youth needs and not on available programs; • placement in housing units and classrooms that take into consideration youth academic and behavioral needs, as well as placement of youth in classes with similar aged youth; • opportunity for youth to earn Carnegie units that transfer to public middle and high schools; • teachers who use content enhancements, strategy instruction, and contextualized learning opportunities to provide access to the general education curriculum; • juvenile correctional schools that are held accountable for providing a free and appropriate public education, meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards, and have a sufficient number of general and special education teachers who are also highly qualified and compensated at the same level as teachers in the local public schools;



Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<p>School-Based Preparatory Experiences (contd.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational settings that include universal, secondary, and tertiary proactive approaches to promoting positive student behavior, as well as counseling services and social skills training; • collaboration and planning among teachers, secure care staff, and mental health professionals to ensure that student’s emotional and behavioral needs are met and that appropriate strategies are used when addressing behaviors that are a manifestation of a student’s disability; • collaboration among general and special educators within the correctional facility, and with public schools concerning the youth’s education, behavior, and transition plan implementation.
<p>Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning Experiences</p> <p style="font-size: 48pt; text-align: center;">2</p>	<p>Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day or through after-school programs and will require collaboration with other organizations. All youth need information on career options, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • career assessments to help identify students’ school and post-school preferences and interests; • structured exposure to postsecondary education and other life-long learning opportunities; • exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation; and, • training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called “soft skills”). <p>In order to identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing; • multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that is specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit; • opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (so called “soft skills”); and, • opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the relationship between planning and career choices and the benefits of planning; • understand the relationship between benefits planning and career choices; and, • learn to find, formally request and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training and employment settings. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need additional supports and services such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in comprehensive vocational programming that is consistent with the youth’s aptitude and interest and with high growth industries in the community to which they will return, as an approach to prevention and diversion from the juvenile justice system; • Vocational education should include scope and sequence for a variety of courses and how they will be adapted to meet the unique needs of the setting and students. Scope and sequence provide a guide for both what students should learn and the order in which concepts should be presented;



Table 1

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GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<p>Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning Experiences</p> <p>(contd.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vocational education should include formal assessment of both student learning and progress toward certification or license requirements in the vocation of study; • development of career pathways that include a list of courses, work experiences, post-secondary options, and career options; • access to employment and work-based experiences on and off facility grounds by collaborating with the community and businesses; • an advocate/job development specialist who can assist in making the youth more employable and provide or assist the youth in obtaining needed training about accessing resources after release, getting records sealed and expunged, and responding to employers' questions about their previous law violations; • training in behavioral skills that may affect sustaining employment (e.g., anger management, accepting feedback, accepting directions); • access to a graduated release program that allows the youth to leave the facility during the day to complete supervised work experience; and, • access to technology to assist in career exploration and job simulation when partial release to work is not a possibility.
<p>Youth Development & Leadership</p> <p style="font-size: 48pt; font-weight: bold; color: white;">3</p>	<p>Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings; • peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities; • exposure to role models in a variety of contexts; • training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution; • exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service; and, • opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem. <p>Youth with disabilities also need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentors and role models including persons with and without disabilities; and • an understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need additional supports and services including transitional services to assist with reintegration into school, community, and the workforce, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement in service other than community service (e.g., youth court) for youth who are diverted from the juvenile justice system; • a highly individualized transition plan that begins upon entry to a juvenile correctional facility and is developed with meaningful youth input;



Table 1

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GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<p>Youth Development & Leadership (contd.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the availability of a transition support model that considers the unique needs of youth involved in juvenile corrections and includes self-determination skills, competitive job placement, flexible educational opportunities, social skills instruction, and immediate service coordination of wrap-around services; • clear instruction concerning relevant laws, rights, and consequences throughout the juvenile justice process; • additional emphasis on self-empowerment through training in self-advocacy, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-determination, and self-sufficiency; • an understanding of risk-taking behaviors (and the relationship to their disabilities) and their consequences, such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, recidivism; and, • formal and informal connections to significant adult role models, peer mentors and older youth who have transitioned from the juvenile justice system.
<p>Connecting Activities</p> <p style="font-size: 48pt; font-weight: bold; text-align: center;">4</p>	<p>Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. All youth may need one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mental and physical health services; • transportation; • housing; • tutoring; • financial planning and management; • post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies; and, • connection to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation). <p>In addition, youth with disabilities may need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies; • community orientation and mobility training (e.g. accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics); • exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies; • personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and, • benefits planning counseling including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that they may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate prevention services that include access to mental health and drug abuse treatment; • access to diversion programs, when appropriate, such as teen court and other community-based options; • advocates at each stage of the juvenile justice process to ensure that youth understand the processes; • support from individuals, programs and systems (e.g. mental health, education, vocational rehabilitation, social services) while confined and for at least one year after release;



Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<p>Connecting Activities (contd.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alcohol and drug abuse treatment that extends for a minimum of one year post-release and includes family involvement, training in life skills and abstinence, and after care (e.g., self-help, support groups); • probation and parole officers that have time, knowledge, and resources to assist youth; • access to transition specialists who can collaborate with relevant professionals across systems (e.g., parole, mental health, child welfare, vocational rehabilitation); • ongoing contact with and visits from public school and job development/placement professionals to maintain contact and support for re-entry; and, • a transitional exit program from the juvenile correctional facility (including day passes) that provides progressively increased involvement with public school and/or job placement.
<p>Family Involvement & Supports</p> <p style="font-size: 48pt; font-weight: bold; text-align: center;">5</p>	<p>Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promote the social, emotional, physical, academic and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have high expectations that build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs, and fosters their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency; • remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood; • have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources; • take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and, • have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families, and other caring adults who have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an understanding of their youth's disability and how it affects his or her education, employment, and/or daily living options; • knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation; • knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and, • an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents who are well-informed and can assist and advocate for them; • facilities and programs that are committed to engaging parents and families in prevention and rehabilitative services; • specific, ongoing opportunities for parent, family, and caring adult involvement, participation, and input at each stage in the juvenile justice process; • family and community involvement as delineated in Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST); and, • family-focused mental health treatment that also includes individual youth therapy, as well as behavioral and/or cognitive/behavioral interventions.



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recommendations can be made concerning effective programs for youth offenders.

The most effective strategy for treating and rehabilitating juvenile offenders and preventing recidivism appears to be a comprehensive, community-based model that integrates: (a) prevention programming; (b) a continuum of pre-trial and sentencing placement options; (c) services and sanctions; and (d) aftercare programs.

As part of a strength-based approach, it is important to identify desired outcomes other than recidivism, such as evaluating whether or not youth remain integrated into the community, school, and the workforce. Other appropriate indicators of success include increased interagency collaboration and provision of appropriate and legally mandated services. The following are just some of the specific programs and intervention models already in action in communities across the country.

- **Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth:** *The Court Employment Project* is a community-based project for juvenile felony offenders that includes “case management, educational instruction and GED preparation classes, social work, art therapy, activities and field trips as well as employment services.” *The Texas Re-Integration Offenders – Youth Project* is a partnership between the Texas juvenile correctional agency and the State workforce development agency that reintegrates youth into the community by linking the correctional agency’s services to the workforce development agency’s job

placement and training programs while youth are incarcerated.

- **Prevention and Intervention:** *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)* is a multi-tiered model using system-wide, targeted, and individualized interventions within a positive and comprehensive system that promotes pro-social skills in youth with and without disabilities within public schools which can also be effectively applied to the juvenile correctional facility setting. *Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG) Model* is a long-standing program that focuses on: (1) school-to-career programs for high school seniors; (2) multi-year dropout prevention for grades 9 to 12; and, (3) dropout recovery that targets dropouts and youth in alternative school settings. JAG provides a complex array of supports that have consistently shown positive effects for 25 years. For example, 2005 graduation rates for students with disabilities and ED were 85.4% and 81.5%, respectively.
- **Non-Institutionalized Juveniles:** *Diversion* to job training and placement, counseling, and alternative schools is an option for non-violent offenders. Some states are developing *Rehabilitative Models* composed of smaller facilities, extensive therapy, quality education, family outreach, highly trained staff, extensive non-residential programming and after-care support. *Family-focused Treatment* often includes a cognitive-behavioral approach, individual therapy, and brief strategic family therapy. An emerging option for youth under 16 with no prior arrests is the use of *Teen Courts*, where a youth admits guilt and a peer jury assigns sanctions such as community service, an apology letter, or restitution.

Multisystemic Therapy uses a combination of empirically-based treatments (e.g. cognitive behavior therapy, parent training, and functional family therapy) to address the multiple variables that are a factor in juvenile behavior. Therapy is available at all times and is provided at the youth’s home and community locations.

- **Institutionalized Juveniles:** *Education* while in corrections, including earning a high school diploma, academic improvement, or an intensive literacy program, decreases recidivism. The *Strategic Instruction Model* which includes teacher-focused interventions (e.g. content-enhancement routines) and student-focused interventions (e.g. learning strategies) helps low-achieving adolescent learners. *Career and Technical Education*, like North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency’s system which has an identical accountability system to the public schools, allows youth to build transferable skills. Both *Behavioral and Mental Health Interventions* can be effective in juvenile corrections settings. When the Illinois Youth Center implemented PBIS, fights decreased from 32 a month to zero in three years. Evidence suggests that counseling, including components such as anger management, social skills training, and career training reduces recidivism. *Transition and After Care*, like Oregon’s Project SUPPORT which provides a transition specialist to work directly with the parole officer of youth with special education or mental health disability, decrease recidivism and demonstrate promising outcomes for formerly confined adolescents with disabilities.

All of the practices mentioned above show promise for youth in corrections,



with low-academic achievement, and/or with various disabilities. In addition to further research to validate these practices on a larger scale and across these populations, it will require knowledgeable youth service professionals, cross-system collaboration, and supportive policy makers to make these promises a reality.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Transition is an awkward period of life for many young adults. But when coupled with the oftentimes negative circumstances of being classified ED, having mental health issues, and/or being involved in the juvenile justice system, these youth face an even more daunting challenge. Fortunately, there are promising practices that can improve the outcomes for these youth. However, the youth service professionals whose jobs are to help them make the right choices and actions cannot do it alone, anymore than these youth can. A set of policy issues need to be addressed by policy

makers, institutions, and organizations at the national, state, and local levels in order to improve the transition outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

1. **Adherence to Federal Law:** Special educators, administrators, correctional professionals, and experts in youth development have identified compliance with laws such as IDEA, No Child Left Behind, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as the most significant issue facing the juvenile justice system. Youth in corrections should receive access to appropriate special education services, adequate yearly progress requirements, high quality teachers, and alternative educational pathways for older youth.
2. **Transitioning Out of Juvenile Corrections:** Juvenile correctional schools must adhere to IDEA requirements regarding transition from high school to post-school education and the workforce. A guaranteed minimum of services should be set for all youth who exit any juvenile facility.

3. **Expanding Promising Practices:** There are a number of emerging promising practices that can and should be replicated throughout the country on a broader scale. Collaborative implementation of such research-based approaches will promote better outcomes for all youth.

4. **Expanding System Collaboration:** Collaborative efforts between education, mental health, juvenile justice, and workforce development systems, should include discussions of policy and practice, methods of implementation, and accountability. Policy makers at all levels of government must support this effort via cross-system funding opportunity and performance measures acknowledging the unique needs of this population.

5. **Professional Development:** For the interventions discussed in the InfoBrief to be effective, there must be comprehensive and ongoing professional development across systems, including judges, youth advocates, attorneys, and direct service providers. Youth service professionals, the centerpiece of the workforce development and juvenile justice systems arena, must possess a broad range of knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve these youth effectively. The NCWD/Y has identified 10 core competencies of effective youth service professionals and they can be found on the NCWD/Y website at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/print/jump-start/ksa/print-chart>.

The research-based promising practices mentioned in this InfoBrief are examples of vehicles through which the Guideposts' philosophy can be achieved. Implementing the Guideposts effectively and to scale may ultimately require the changes in policy described. Nonetheless, long-term

RESOURCES

- National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum (NCAC)** For more information, go to <http://4.17.143.133/ncac/>
- University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (UKCRL) The Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)** For more information, go to <http://www.kucrl.org/>
- National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** For more information, go to <http://www.pbis.org/main.htm>

- Job Corps** For more information, go to <http://www.jobcorps.gov/home.aspx>
- North Carolina Technical Education** For more information, go to http://www.ncpublicschools.org/workforce_development/index.html
- The National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or At Risk (NDTAC)** For more information, go to <http://www.neglecteddelinquent.org/nd/default.asp>
- The Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER) Center** For more information, go to <http://www.pacer.org/>

- Project SUPPORT Project Parole SUPPORT (Service Utilization Promoting Positive Outcomes in Rehabilitation and Transition for Incarcerated Adolescents with Disabilities)** For more information, go to <http://www.uoregon.edu/~sset/SUPPORT/projectSupport.htm>
- The Federal Youth Court Program** For more information, go to <http://www.youthcourt.net/>
- Multi-systemic Therapy** For more information, go to <http://www.mstservices.com/>



employment success of youth, with and without disabilities, involved in or at risk of being involved in the juvenile justice system is possible where the systems responsible for serving these youth collaborate in a meaningful and purposeful way to address their developmental needs.

Source: Gagnon, J. C., & Richards, C. (2008). *Making the Right Turn: A Guide about Improving Transition Outcomes of Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System*. Washington, DC: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership.

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