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Matching Services and Promoting Positive Youth Development

Samantha Harvell, Hanna Love, Elizabeth Pelletier, Chloe Warnberg, and Constance Hull

WHAT DOES THIS FACT SHEET COVER?

A research overview for why juvenile probation should match youth to services and promote positive youth development.

Suggestions for individualized youth programming including exploring programs and identifying trainers, allowing youth to self-identify, and being culturally competent and gender responsive.

Suggestions for connecting youth with targeted evidence-based programs, including learning what programs are available.

Suggestions for connecting youth with supportive adults, including promoting connections and creating feedback systems.

Suggestions for promoting skill building, including connecting youth to interesting and valuable opportunities and promoting life skills development.

Juvenile justice interventions based in fear, deterrence, and control are often ineffective. Programs focused on positive community support, strength-building, and cognitive-behavioral techniques reduce recidivism more effectively. Positive youth development has been shown to improve academic achievement, family communication, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life skills. Probation officers can face many barriers as they try to connect youth with services, so they should focus on addressing criminogenic needs and their underlying causes.

CONNECT YOUTH TO INDIVIDUALIZED CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING

WHY: The little research available on this topic suggests including cultural elements within a program can increase effectiveness. Different components of identity can influence both youth's access to resources *and* how youth are treated and perceived by system actors. Programming should aim to respect and affirm youth's cultures.

HOW: Explore programming and identify trainers. Explore programming and build networks to take advantage of new opportunities as they become available. Identify trainers to teach about how you perceive differences in youth and how youths' attributes affect how they are treated in the system.

HOW: Allow youth to self-identify. Provide an opportunity for youth to self-identify their ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, but allow them to decline if they do not feel comfortable. Ask *all* youth their preferred name and gender.

HOW: Connect youth with culturally competent and gender-responsive programming. Use in-person interpreters for non-English-speaking youth and caregivers. Provide informational materials in their native languages, even if they speak English. Connect girls with gender-responsive programming.

CASE STUDY: MULTNOMAH COUNTY COMMUNITIES OF COLOR INITIATIVE

To improve racial equity within its juvenile justice system, Multnomah County, Oregon, worked with community organizations with ties to African American and Latino communities to locate culturally competent case management, treatment, and mentoring for at-risk youth of color. The county also developed a culturally sensitive risk assessment instrument, implemented a hiring initiative to increase the diversity of juvenile justice staff, and provided staff training on racial and ethnic disproportionality.

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CONNECT YOUTH WITH EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS THAT TARGET IDENTIFIED CRIMINOGENIC NEEDS

WHY: Many evidence-based programs support rehabilitating youth within their own communities and recognize that families, caregivers, and adults provide critical supports for healthy development. While programs need not be certified "evidence based," it is imperative that programming be evaluated to ensure services address criminogenic needs of youth.

HOW: Know what is available. Consider evidence-based programs proven effective in multiple settings.

CONNECT YOUTH WITH SUPPORTIVE ADULTS IN THEIR COMMUNITY

WHY: Research supports the need to connect youth with other positive, long-term adult relationships who will remain connected with youth after their juvenile justice involvement has ended.

HOW: Promote connections. Let youth and caregivers identify existing positive supports in their lives and support these relationships. Consider the impact of prohibiting contact with other youth and adults on probation versus the advantages of credible messenger mentoring. Help youth identify community groups where they can foster a sense of belonging.

HOW: Create feedback systems. Check in with other adults in youth's lives to discuss youth's development. Cultivate relationships with groups and supportive agencies in youth's communities.

CASE STUDY: CREDIBLE MESSENGER MENTORING

Credible messenger mentoring connects justice-involved youth with adults from similar backgrounds, often with prior system involvement, to form positive connections. A crucial aspect of the programs is the relatability of the mentors, who often come from the same communities and are from the same racial and socioeconomic backgrounds as youth.

Arches is a credible messenger mentoring program for young adults ages 16–24 on probation in New York City. A recent study found that participating in Arches reduces one-year felony reconviction by over two-thirds and two-year felony reconviction by over half, with especially profound impacts for the youngest participants.

PROMOTE SKILL BUILDING AND APPLICATION OF THESE SKILLS

WHY: A goal of the juvenile justice system is to build new skills to replace what previously contributed to criminogenic risk. Research supports the use of skill development in curbing high-risk behavior.

HOW: Connect youth to interesting, valuable opportunities. Ask youth to identify opportunities that are interesting to them *and* valuable to their community. Make sure opportunities do not conflict with normal development (e.g., do not interfere with school and home life).

HOW: Promote life skills development. Ensure youth can access life skills training and have the documents necessary to seek employment or education. Connect youth to programs that align with their career interests and passions.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FOR SYSTEM-INVOLVED LGBTQ YOUTH: *Coalition for Juvenile Justice, SOS Project (Section 1.10)*
FOR INFORMATION ON WORKING WITH JUSTICE-INVOLVED LATINA GIRLS: *Mi Hermana's Keeper toolkit*
FOR RESOURCES ON BUILDING A SUPPORT GROUP FOR GIRLS: *Girls Circle*
TO FIND EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS: *OJJDP's Model Programs Guide*
FOR INFORMATION ON MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS: *National Mentoring Resource Center*

This fact sheet summarizes chapter 4 of *Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation: Rethinking Strategies to Promote Long-Term Change*. The full report includes citations for the research summarized here.