URBAN INSTITUTE · ELEVATE · THE · DEBATE

This fact sheet summarizes key takeaways from *Bridging Research and Practice: A Handbook for Implementing Research-Informed Practices in Juvenile Probation*. The handbook includes citations for the research summarized here.

Changing Practice in Juvenile Probation: Implementing and Sustaining the Change

Samantha Harvell, Teresa Derrick-Mills, Constance Hull, Andreea Matei

Overview

The knowledge base on how to improve public safety and outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system has expanded substantially. This fact sheet is one of several Urban resources intended to help juvenile probation agencies and officers understand adolescent development, what works to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and how to change practice in juvenile probation agencies. These resources focus on what frontline practices need to change and on the administrative activities needed to support a change.

Integrating and Sustaining the Change

Researchers in the field of implementation science have studied how organizational change efforts succeed. They have focused on the key drivers of successful organizational practice: key competencies, organizational structures and processes, leadership strategies (see the "administrative activities" box in figure 1), and the cycle of continuous quality improvement (represented by the arrows flowing around figure 1).

Research also indicates that successful change in an organization, agency, or department is a process that typically takes two to four years to complete. This fact sheet focuses on the last two stages of the change process – what we refer to *as implementing (or integrating)* and *sustaining the change*. [See Getting Ready to Make a Change for information about the *exploration* and *preparation* stages.]

Implementing the Change: Integrating and Aligning

In the "integration" stage, the agency or organization begins making changes to administrative activities (changes identified during the "preparation" stage), and works to fully integrate those changes into daily practices and routines. Such changes could include the following:

Staff Competencies

- starting up new professional development strategies (e.g., training and coaching)
- aligning job descriptions and performance expectations for staff

Organizational Structures and Processes

- enacting and operationalizing the alignment changes identified in the preparation stage
- piloting changes when possible to test for possible unintended consequences
- regularly meeting with external partners to discuss how the changes are going, and continue building momentum
- adjusting caseloads if needed

Leadership Strategies

- tracking accomplishments and challenges
- listening to staff concerns
- celebrating milestones or successes
- actively engaging to demonstrate ongoing commitment to the change
- securing resources to support the change

Sustaining the Change

In this stage, the "change" has become routine practice, but research shows that maintaining high quality practices over time requires continued attention. The following strategies will help agencies sustain change:

Staff Competencies

- ensure staff receive ongoing professional development and feedback
- help staff understand how to use their skills in the environment of shifting priorities

Organizational Structures and Processes

- continue reviewing policies, procedures, and data systems
- make changes based on staff feedback and challenges faced in routine implementation
- consider how changes in community or political priorities may cause misalignments
- continue meeting with external stakeholders and share results so they can see the value of the change

Leadership Strategies

- sustain the commitment—staff need to hear that maintaining the change is important
- adopt a continuous quality-improvement approach that keeps all agency leaders focused on routinely observing, reflecting on, and solving problems

VISUALIZING THE APPROACH TO SUPPORTING LONG-TERM BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN YOUTH

An Agency Perspective on Implementing a Research-Informed Approach to Juvenile Probation

Contextual Factors

- System Organization
- External Stakeholders
- Judicial Dynamics
- Community Engagement
- Community Resources

Inputs

- Research on adolescent development
- Training and technical assistance materials
- Youth
- Supportive adults
- Caregivers
- Probation agency staff and resources

Continuous Quality Improvement

Administrative Activities to Support and Improve Quality and Sustain Change

Staff Competencies

- Identify needed knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors
- Communicate and assess competencies
- Support attainment of new competencies
- Recognize that learning new competencies takes time and active engagement (training alone is not enough)
- Revise job descriptions and align performance expectations

Organizational Structures and Processes

- Create multiple avenues supporting communication
- Engage staff from all levels
- Develop decision-support systems that facilitate data tracking and feedback loops
- Engage external stakeholders early and often
- Align policies and procedures with the new approach

Leadership Strategies

- Demonstrate commitment to the change
- Anticipate the time needed to make the changes
- Allocate resources to support the change
- Foster and generate staff enthusiasm
- Recognize the importance of supervisors as leaders
- Promote the change throughout the community

Continuous Quality Improvement

Change in Organizational Culture and Frontline Practices

- Assessment and structured decisionmaking
- Case planning
- Matching services and promoting positive youth development
- Promoting long-term behavior change
- Incentivizing success and implementing graduated responses

Outcomes

Probation Agency Outcomes

- Meaningful interactions with youth
- Reduced recidivism
- More efficient resource use

Community Outcomes

- Improved public safety
- More youth engaged in prosocial activities
- Stronger workforce

Family Outcomes

- Increased family engagement
- Improved communication, cohesion, and family functioning

Youth Outcomes

- More/healthier relationships with adults
- Improvements in critical life skills
- Increased engagement in prosocial activities
- Better critical thinking and impulse control
- Improved academic engagement and achievement
- Improved job readiness and employment
- Improved perceptions of legal authorities and legitimacy of law

Continuous Quality Improvement

Continuous Quality Improvement

This project was supported by grant number 2015-MU-MU-K002 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice nor should they be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples. Copyright © September 2019. Urban Institute. Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.