

Louisiana Juvenile Justice Reform Efforts in Last Five Years

Stephen Phillippi, PhD, LCSW & Debra DePrato, MD

In recent years, an array of risk and needs screening and assessment instruments, as well as different evidence-based programs and services have been introduced within the state.

Several evidence-based programs and practices, including Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), and Motivational Interviewing (MI), have been adopted on a wider scale throughout the state.

Recognizing the importance of investing in interventions with a proven track record, Louisiana has undertaken efforts to adopt and expand the use of evidence-based programs and practices. Particularly notable has been growing presence of two nationally-recognized, community-based, in-home interventions, MST and FFT. Both models have been shown to demonstrate success in lowering recidivism, preventing out of home placement, decreasing mental health symptoms, reducing family conflict, increasing school performance, and lowering substance abuse with moderate and high risk/need youth. To date, the use of these two programs has been expanded across Louisiana, and the state is now ranked 2nd in the nation for advancing these two services per capita (Greenwood, Welsh, Rosica, Barber & Medrano, 2012). Together these two programs now have a total of 44 teams throughout Louisiana and are serving over 2,200 families annually.

Similarly, there has been a widespread adoption of Motivational Interviewing (MI), a technique used to elicit behavior change by effectively engaging youth and families to explore and resolve ambivalence related to specific targeted areas of change. MI has been applied to address a wide range of problem behaviors related to alcohol and substance abuse, as well as promoting court ordered behavioral changes in probation interventions. Outcomes associated with MI include improved treatment retention and adherence, increased adherence to service referrals from probation, and increased adherence with court orders. With technical assistance by IPHJ, MI practices have been implemented with Jefferson Parish FINS, probation, and service providers; Rapides Parish FINS and probation; Calcasieu FINS and probation; the 16th Judicial District Prosecutors Early Intervention Program, the 4th Judicial District Juvenile Drug Court; and, to a more limited extent, throughout OJJ’s probation offices statewide.

The 4th Judicial District and the University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM) have implemented a substance abuse assessment model to more effectively screen, assess, and treat youth in the juvenile drug court.

Through a collaboration supported by the IPHJ, the court and ULM implemented research-driven practices to screen, assess, and treat the youth in its juvenile drug court. This effort put into place standardized, scientifically-sound screening and assessment instruments that were appropriate for the population being served; established clear decision rules and response policies for both further assessment and service linkage;

Painting a Clearer Picture of Provider Capacity

At the state and local levels, the IPHJ and its partners created an instrument that has been utilized to analyze trends in services provided to youth in the juvenile justice system. This instrument has provided critical information to state agencies, regional Child and Youth Planning Boards, and local jurisdictions to assist them in understanding current services available to system-involved youth, the quality of those services, gaps in service, and the capacity of existing providers based on level and type of staff and the youth needs they serve. Most notably, this instrument has aided strategic planning and facilitated transformation in a number of service provider organizations to adopt better practices to meet local needs, including Jefferson, Calcasieu, Rapides, and the 4th Judicial District. *Between 2007 and 2011, this survey found a 35% rise in the proportion of juvenile justice related programs self-reporting as an evidence-based program. Even more importantly, the proportion of youth being served by evidence-based programs compared to other programs also rose.*

and crafted policies to establish what information will be shared and how it will be communicated to ensure the best working relationship between treatment services and the court. This model is being reviewed by juvenile drug courts as a model for replication throughout the state.

The 16th Judicial District and Rapides Parish have developed effective partnerships between the juvenile justice system and local schools, which have improved linkages to needed services without formal court or system involvement.

Traditionally, partnerships between schools and juvenile justice agencies have led to a net-widening effect with youth arrested at higher rates and or expeditiously sent to courts without an exhaustion of lower-level, informal behavioral interventions. In two sites, Louisiana has demonstrated that juvenile justice services and schools can work together to provide youth with needed interventions without increasing arrests or accelerating paths to juvenile court. In the 16th Judicial District, the prosecutor's Early Intervention Program is collaborating with local schools to offer a combination of evidence-based practices, which has led to increased attendance, decreases in family conflict and behavioral problems at school, and lower recidivism rates in relation to delinquent acts. In Rapides Parish, this partnership involved the implementation of research driven practices for School Resource Officers. Local police and school-based officers received Crisis Intervention Training for Youth (CIT-Y) which focuses on how best to respond to youth with mental illness. Specifically, CIT-Y helps officers learn how to de-escalate youth, better assess situations, and link youth with mental illness to services instead of arrest whenever possible. Both programs are well-documented and can be shared with other jurisdictions.

Beginning in 2010, both OJJ and Jefferson Parish began to emphasize a preference for evidence-based programs through its RFP process, leading to an increase in research-driven interventions.

Recognizing the value of investing in proven programs, both OJJ and Jefferson Parish have used their contracting processes to secure evidence-based programs. Jefferson Parish demonstrated the most progress in this area: in 2007, officials reported no contract dollars were being spent on evidence-based programs for its youth on probation. As of 2010, all (100%) of Jefferson Parish's probation service contracts were signed with providers offering evidence-based programs, affording 94% of their youth on probation with access to a proven service. Even though OJJ's ability to contract for community services has recently been curtailed, both entities have helped propel a new framework for RFPs that prioritizes funding for the implementation of the best evidence-based programs; requires unproven programs to include an evaluation component to continue funding; and discontinuing funding support for programs found to be ineffective.

There has been increased training to support the understanding and use of both the SAVRY and new evidence-based programs and practices statewide.

Each of the OJJ regions, along with the local probation offices that have implemented the SAVRY, received training on how to administer and effectively and actively use the instrument to guide informal case planning. In addition, state and local leaders, with assistance from IPHJ coordinated experts, have reached out to judges and attorneys to present and discuss the purpose of risk assessment and offer insight into what risk assessments can and cannot do.

Separately, many regions and local agencies involved in juvenile justice have placed a major emphasis on raising awareness about evidence-based practices by regularly meeting with stakeholders and decision-makers. Drawing on the resources coordinated by IPHJ, these events have helped secure buy-in from stakeholders (including judges, attorneys, and families) and helped them become better-versed in their local jurisdictions' target populations, resources, and needs, and how they align with particular evidence-based programs and expected outcomes.

For more information download the entire report, "Sustaining Juvenile Justice System Reform: A Report to the Louisiana Juvenile Justice Implementation Commission," at <http://publichealth.lsuhsu.edu/iphj/sustainingreform.html>