The NJJEC Bulletin

NJJEC is a project of the Justice Research and Statistics Association funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). NJJEC’s purpose is to improve the evaluation capacity of states, localities, and tribes, and facilitate the use of evidence-based programs and practices in juvenile justice. The NJJEC Bulletin is disseminated directly to subscribers and posted on the NJJEC website, and provides information related to juvenile justice evaluation that is of interest to state, local, and tribal juvenile justice professionals.

We welcome your participation! If you would like to submit an article, suggest a news item for the Bulletin, or ask a question about evaluation, email njjec@jrsa.org. For more information about the resources available through the National Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center, visit the NJJEC website.

What’s Going On at NJJEC?

Please check out NJJEC’s tutorial on conducting a meaningful evaluation of juvenile justice programs. We just updated the tutorial with a new interface and added an online interactive quiz.

Do you have a suggestion for a new webinar topic or resource? Email njjec@jrsa.org!

Upcoming Events of Interest

National Mentoring Summit
January 28 – 30th, 2015
The Mentoring Partnership will hold its annual National Mentoring Summit in Washington DC on January 28th – 30th. More details and registration information are available online.

Webinar: Implementing Risk Assessment Tools and Measuring Outcomes
February 19th,
2:00 pm – 3:30 pm (EST)
NJJEC, in collaboration with OJJDP, will host a webinar focused on the implementation of risk assessment tools within juvenile probation departments to guide dispositional recommendations and case planning. Presenters will be Dr. Gina Vincent, from the National Youth Screening and Assessment Partners, and Kelly Clement, from the Office of Juvenile Justice in Louisiana. More details and registration information are available online.

National Conference on Health and Domestic Violence
March 19 - 21, 2015
Futures Without Violence will host the National Conference on Health and Domestic Violence in Washington, DC. One of the aims of the conference is to improve the health system’s response to domestic violence survivors. Sessions will also include presentations addressing children’s exposure to violence and the Defending Childhood Initiative. More details and registration information are available online.
31st International Symposium on Child Abuse  
*March 23 - 26, 2015*

The 31st International Symposium on Child Abuse will be held in Huntsville, Alabama. The conference will include more than 130 workshops on a broad range of issues in the child maltreatment field. More details and registration information can be found online.

**Featured Resources: Publications**

The *Status Offense Reform Center*, a project of the Center on Youth Justice at the Vera Institute, has just completed the 4th module in its *Toolkit for Status Offense System Reform*. This 4th module is a Brief entitled *Monitoring and Sustaining System Change*. It outlines three strategies for monitoring and sustaining system change efforts in the treatment of status offenders: performance measurement, process evaluations, and outcome evaluations. The toolkit’s three previous modules on status offense system reform focus on engaging stakeholders, using data to guide system change efforts, and planning and implementing system change.

The *National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)* recently released *School Pathways to the Juvenile Justice System Project: A Practice Guide*, to assist in efforts to reduce the number of discipline referrals to the juvenile justice system. The guide is aimed at juvenile and family court judges in 16 demonstration sites chosen by the NCJFCJ. Judicial leadership in each demonstration site is engaged in court/school partnerships meant to address the unintended consequences of zero tolerance school discipline policies. The guide provides a framework for facilitating a strategic planning process, in which a shared vision, measurable goals, and ongoing monitoring processes are implemented.

A new Brief has been released by *The Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative* entitled *You Can’t Fix What You Don’t Look At: Acknowledging Race in Addressing Racial Discipline Disparities*. The collaborative consists of researchers, practitioners, and advocates who are working to increase the level of knowledge on evidence-based interventions to reduce disparities in school discipline practices. Their most recent brief, *Acknowledging Race*, highlights the importance of educators and administrators engaging in discussions about race in discipline disparities, disaggregating discipline data by race, and developing race-conscious intervention and evaluation strategies. Previous briefs provide an overview of discipline disparities by describing the empirical evidence demonstrating discipline disparities, as well as describing interventions and policies for reducing discipline disparities.

The *Justice Policy Institute (JPI)* has released a new report, *Sticker Shock: Calculating the Full Price Tag for Youth Incarceration*, which documents the state-by-state costs to incarcerate youth. According to the report, 33 U.S. states and jurisdictions spend $100,000 or more annually to incarcerate each young person. The report also estimates the indirect costs of confinement, such as the costs of recidivism to victims, and loss of educational opportunities and its implications for youths’ ability to work and pay taxes.
Featured Evaluation:
MST with Ethnic Minority Youth

Although research has supported Multi-systemic Therapy (MST) as an evidence-based practice, there have still been concerns that studies have not had a substantial number of ethnic minority youth. In 2014, a study of MST in Los Angeles County was published in OJJDP’s Journal of Juvenile Justice. This study investigated the effectiveness of MST with ethnic minority youth, focusing in particular on Hispanic youth. The following is a summary of this published study, which was conducted over an 8-year period and examined justice-related outcomes for justice-involved youth in Los Angeles County.

In this study, the researchers were not able to use an experimental design in which they randomly assign eligible youth to either an MST treatment group or a control (no MST treatment) group. However, they were able to use a quasi-experimental design in which a comparison group was matched with the MST treatment group on demographic variables and criminal history. The comparison group consisted of youth who were eligible for MST but unable to enroll for various reasons (e.g., they lacked Medicaid coverage). Participants in the study consisted of 757 youth who were accepted into the county’s MST program (77% Latino, 17% Black and 4% white) and 380 youth (69% Latino, 24% Black, 5% white) who met the eligibility criteria for MST but who did not enroll.

Outcomes for individual participants were analyzed at six months after completion of the program. Overall, youth in the MST treatment group and youth in the comparison group did not demonstrate significant differences in regard to arrests, completing probation, or completing restitution. However, youth in the MST treatment group did have significantly lower incarceration rates and higher rates of completing community service.

When examining outcomes specifically for Latino youth, the study found that youth in the MST treatment group had significantly lower rates of arrest and incarceration, and higher rates of probation completion than youth in the comparison group. For Black youth, the only significant differences were for arrests, with youth in the MST treatment group arrested at higher rates after the follow-up period than youth in the comparison group.

Baseline and follow-up assessments differed significantly with regard to overall functioning of youth. Specifically, youth in the MST treatment group demonstrated significantly higher scores on parenting skills, family relations, network of social supports, educational/vocational success, and involvement with prosocial peers than those in the comparison group.

The study was not without limitations. In particular, it is unclear whether the reasons youth in the comparison group did not enroll in MST distinguished them from youth in the MST treatment group in a way that significantly influenced outcomes. Also, the six-month follow-up period was relatively short. Despite these limitations, the study does suggest that MST is an effective treatment for Latino youth. More studies on African American youth are needed, however, to better determine the effectiveness of MST with this cohort.
Local Spotlight: Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana

The Office of Juvenile Justice Services (OJJS) in Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana has recently been recognized for its data-driven approach to improving its juvenile justice system. In November 2014, the National Center on Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) released a report reviewing the lessons learned by the Calcasieu Parish OJJS’s efforts to become more data-driven. The report explains that the Calcasieu Parish work is embedded in their long-standing commitment to system reform efforts as demonstrated by their involvement in the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and the McArthur Foundation’s, Models for Change initiative.

One of the key efforts discussed in the report is Calcasieu Parish’s work to build their internal capacity to manage and use data more effectively. According to NCJJ’s report, the Parish prioritized “good data,” updated and improved their automated data system, and realigned resources to create a full-time data management analyst position. Fortunately, they were able to find among their own ranks a probation officer who also had IT experience, and he was able to eventually take on data management tasks full time.

Another theme discussed in the report is OJJS’s efforts to integrate data into decision-making. OJJS established regular weekly data reviews with supervisors and managers. At these meetings the data manager provided aggregated data reports that would allow staff to drill down to case level details. The NCJJ report emphasized that having both aggregate and case-level data was central to OJJS developing strategies to address critical system issues. Also, the improved data system was able to automatically generate a number of “push” and “dashboard” data reports that helped staff at every level monitor key areas in the system. For example, automated reports related to detention helped staff more closely monitor detained youth and the reasons for keeping them detained.

A number of other themes and lessons learned are highlighted in the NCJJ report as well. The report concludes by noting that while a number of sites within Louisiana have become more data-driven due to their involvement in system reform efforts, Calcasieu Parish has made substantial improvements in their data system and use of data, with marginal additional costs.