NJJEC Bulletin

What’s Going On at NJJEC?

NJJEC recently presented a series of webinars in conjunction with OJJDP. The Assessing Project Performance: Building Blocks of Evaluation and Performance Measurement webinars covered a variety of topics including evaluation, performance measurement, program logic, and logic modeling. The first webinar, Basics of Performance Measurement and Evaluation was attended by 645 state, local, and tribal juvenile justice professionals on January 19, while nearly 500 attendees tuned in for the Introduction and Advanced Program Logic webinars February 22 and 23. Slides, audio, and other materials are available on the NTTAC website as well as on the NJJEC website. Thank you to everyone who participated!

The final webinar of the series, Data Collection and Analysis, will be held March 22, 2012 at 2:00 p.m. Topics include techniques for collecting accurate, high quality data, best practices for recording and storing data, techniques for using data and sharing results, and the use of data collection and analysis for program development and sustainability. Register for this session on the NTTAC website.

Upcoming Events of Interest

Blueprints Conference April 2012
The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado will be hosting the Blueprints for Violence Prevention Conference in San Antonio, Texas April 11-13. The conference will focus on the use of evidence-based programs and practices in youth violence prevention. Check the Blueprints Conference page for more information and to register.

Adolescent Treatment Effectiveness Meeting April 2012
The Joint Meeting on Adolescent Treatment Effectiveness (JMATE) will be held April 10-12 in Washington, DC. Researchers and practitioners will collaborate to promote effective practices in adolescent substance abuse treatment. Check the JMATE site for more information and to register.
Featured Resources: Recidivism in Juvenile Justice

OJJDP recently updated the agency’s Statistical Briefing Book with a variety of juvenile justice data, including juvenile populations, offenses, juvenile offenders in residential placement, and juvenile court data. National-, state-, and county-level data are available for examination and analysis, making this a great tool for juvenile justice professionals seeking to define a local problem, describe the context in which a juvenile justice program or initiative is operating, and make comparisons about juvenile offending across states or jurisdictions. One type of data that you won't find in this great resource is recidivism data.

While juvenile justice professionals frequently want to know how their recidivism rates stack up against other programs, localities, or states, this can be a difficult phenomenon to quantify and compare.

Recidivism is a complex topic, particularly in juvenile justice. Definitional differences across state and local systems make comparison of recidivism rates a difficult task. Practitioners and researchers use a variety of definitions of recidivism: reoffending, rearrest resulting from a new criminal offense, reoffending by committing the same type of offense, rearrest resulting from a new offense or technical violation of community supervision.... And the list goes on.

Juvenile recidivism rate comparisons are particularly difficult if not impossible, because state systems have different laws defining juvenile offenders, offenses, and adjudication processes. For example consider a 14-year-old offender whose second interaction with law enforcement occurs after his 18th birthday, or a 17-year-old offender adjudicated delinquent who commits his next offense after release from a correctional facility at age 21. Further muddying the waters, some states publish success rates rather than failure rates, and may include a host of factors in computing either success or failure.

Despite the complexities, practitioners continue to explore this topic by examining other successes of youth beyond a lack of rearrest, including education, employment, mental health, and substance abuse. As many of these programs and treatments are multi-dimensional and seek to improve areas of juveniles’ lives outside of abstaining from crime, only examining rearrest or incarceration as an outcome measure is insufficient.

One example of these initiatives is the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA) Positive Youth Outcomes (PYO) project. The goal of this project is to increase the ability of juvenile correctional agencies to collect and analyze positive youth outcomes data by reaching a consensus on the types of data needed for this endeavor as well as the best way to collect these data.

Corrections Today published an article by Collette S. Peters and Shannon Myrick of the Oregon Youth Authority discussing this effort, Read “Juvenile Recidivism—Measuring Success or Failure: Is There a Difference?” for more information.

State Spotlight

Kentucky

With funding from an OJJDP Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG), the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice recently conducted a needs assessment of the training academy attended by the state’s juvenile justice youth workers. The purpose of the needs assessment was to examine the effectiveness of current training, and identify
training elements that could be added or improved upon so that staff are able to provide effective treatment and intervention services to youth in the Kentucky juvenile justice system. Staff training is an important component in operating effective juvenile justice programs and interventions, and a frequently unexamined element of program implementation. The needs assessment examined the tasks performed by juvenile justice workers, the curriculum taught at the training academy, and the methods by which this curriculum is delivered. Read the full press release in the Recent News section of KYDJJ’s website or read the Executive Summary of the report.

Ohio
The Family Justice Program of the Vera Institute of Justice recently released a research brief on the Families as Partners project that was implemented in the Ohio Department of Youth Services. The Ohio DYS and Vera developed and implemented the Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool (JRIT) to facilitate understanding about the importance of communication between incarcerated youth and their families, and to encourage this interaction via institutional policy.

Featured Evaluation

**Implementation Evaluation of the District of Columbia Put Families First Program**
Joshua Markman, Akiva Liberman, and Jocelyn Fontaine
The Urban Institute Justice Policy Center
November 2011

As we discussed in the January edition of the NJJEC Bulletin, implementation analysis examines whether or not a program’s activities follow the program plan rather than focusing on program outcomes. Implementation analysis is a critical but often overlooked component of effective operation of evidence-based programs and practices (EBP). Once a considerable amount of solid research indicates a program is effective (i.e., it qualifies as an EBP), the focus should turn to implementation fidelity, or adherence to the program model, as programmers can be reasonably certain of the program’s effectiveness if fidelity to the model exists.

The Urban Institute’s implementation evaluation of the District of Columbia’s Put Families First program provides a comprehensive examination of the implementation process. The Put Families First program is based on Functional Family Therapy (FFT), a Blueprints for Violence Prevention model program that reduces delinquency by improving communication between youth and family, as well as increasing protective factors against delinquency while reducing risk factors. The target population for Put Families First is 11- to 18-year-old youth who are at risk of out-of-home placement.

The evaluation examines both the internal and external processes that affect the delivery of treatment based on the FFT model. Program data included the number of referrals by agency and reason for referral, client characteristics, case processing, caseload per therapist, timing between referral and treatment, number and timing of therapy sessions, participant and therapist assessments of family functioning and relationship with treatment provider, and therapist fidelity in treatment administration. Sources of data included program documents and materials, semi-structured interviews with program stakeholders, and performance measurement data from youth, therapists, and referring agencies.

The implementation evaluation examined factors that, according to the FFT program
logic, impact the ability of the program to reduce delinquency. Internal examination of program operations focused on consistency in treatment from multiple service providers, a critical element for any program that involves multi-site intervention or treatment. Time to treatment was another important factor: treatment providers were expected to contact referrals within 48 hours, and initiate the first treatment session within one week of the referral time. Greater lag time between the referral and contact with the therapist might reduce the interest and effort of youth or their families to actively participate in the program. Further, the expected dosage of treatment was 10 to 12 one-hour sessions over three to four months of treatment. This is also a critical component of treatment effectiveness, as fewer or shorter sessions might diminish the strength of this type of treatment for the youth and his or her family. Parental participation was also examined, as this element is an essential component of family-based treatment, as well as therapist turnover, in that this might affect the relationship between the therapist and treatment recipients and reduce the effectiveness of the therapy.

Another focus of the implementation evaluation was the referral process by which youth were recommended for or ordered into treatment. As referrals were made by multiple agencies and organizations, careful examination of the selection criteria for inclusion and exclusion from the program were particularly important. Even though the referral process is outside the scope of the actual treatment, it is a very important element in service delivery because it shapes the program’s target population.

Read the full text of the report on the Urban Institute website.