NJJEC Bulletin

What’s Going On at NJJEC?

NJJEC staff have created *Hiring and Working With An Evaluator*, the first presentation in a series of short, narrated slidewows on program evaluation and performance measurement. This resource discusses the advantages of hiring an evaluator, how to select an evaluator, and how to develop and evaluation plan. Access the video on the NJJEC Skill-Building Page.

The next narrated slideshow in the series will discuss the important elements of good program evaluation. It is designed to assist practitioners in determining the quality of an evaluation, and the strength of research evidence about the effects of an intervention or program.

NJJEC staff will deliver a webinar entitled, “Making ‘What Works’ Work for You: Evidence-Based Components and Adaptation” on Thursday, April 25th. Panelists will discuss the advantages of an evidence-based components approach to programming, and how and when practitioners should consider modifying an EBP. Registration is available on the OJJDP NTTAC website.

Upcoming Events of Interest

Boys and Girls Clubs of America 2013 National Conference
May 1-May 3
The Boys and Girls Clubs of America will hold its 2013 National Conference focusing on youth development in Orlando, Florida May 1-May 3. Check the website for conference information and to register! The deadline for the special hotel rate is March 29.

Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) Spring Conference
May 2-May 5
The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) will hold its annual conference May 2-May 5 at the Dupont Circle Hotel in Washington, DC. The theme of this year’s conference is “Building Supportive Communities to Prevent Violence and Delinquency.” Conference information, including a draft agenda and registration information, is available on CJJ’s website.
Featured Resources:
The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC)

There are a number of resources dedicated to program effectiveness and evidence-based practice in juvenile justice: Crimesolutions.gov, the Model Programs Guide, and Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development (formerly Blueprints for Violence Prevention), to name a few.

As we discussed in the July 2012 issue of the NJJEC Bulletin, resources available from non-justice fields such as psychology and education can be useful tools for juvenile justice practitioners interested in learning about effective interventions. These resources are of particular interest to service providers working with crossover youth, who are involved in both juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) provides information on successful evidence-based interventions related to child abuse, neglect, and mental health. The child welfare programs included in the CEBC are either in use or marketed in California, but many are nationally recognized and have been implemented in other states and localities. In fact, many of the programs the CEBC designates as well-supported by research can also be found in juvenile justice evidence-based program tools. These interventions include Motivational Interviewing, Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDT).

The Clearinghouse informs practitioners about the strength of the evidence supporting a program. Each program is ranked along a continuum from well-supported to concerning practice. Experts in the field determine the ratings based on published, peer-reviewed research. Those not able to be rated due to insufficient evidence are assigned a rating of NR. The relevance of each intervention to the child welfare system is designated as high, medium, or low.

In addition to program ratings, CEBC collects implementation resources for programs ranked “Well-Supported by Research Evidence” and “Supported by Research Evidence.” These resources are designed to assist practitioners with executing an evidence-based program plan with fidelity to the model. The Clearinghouse also provides general tools for implementing child welfare programs and approaches to implementation used in other fields.

The CEBC includes information on screening and assessment tools for child welfare, and rates these tools with a separate system that designates the reliability and validity of the tools—that is, whether or not they measure behavior and characteristics consistently and accurately. The group of assessment tools rated by the CEBC includes the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) that examine characteristics of youth and their families. To be eligible for rating, an assessment tool must be related to child welfare and include administration instructions.
**Evaluation Feature:**  
**Effective Assessment Tools**

Assessment tools are widely used in juvenile justice to determine needs of youth, best intervention and treatment options, and risk of future delinquency. Because important decisions about treatment and intervention are based on youths’ needs/risk assessment scores, it is critical for practitioners to use instruments that have been properly evaluated and shown to be effective.

Just as there are many evidence-based programs shown to improve outcomes for youth, there are a number of assessment tools that effectively measure youths’ personality characteristics and risk factors. These instruments are able to predict future offending with some degree of accuracy.

Once an assessment tool has been implemented in your jurisdiction or program, additional steps are needed to make sure that tool is effective and has been implemented properly in your particular context—that is, it is being administered and scored correctly, and responses to scores are appropriate. The first of these steps is to compare assessment scores in your population with a normative sample for which the tool has already been validated, and determine potential explanations for any notable differences in average scores.

The Hennepin County (MN) Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation’s Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation provides a great example of this. The DOCCR’s [YLS/CMI Norming Report](#) examines scores on the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) in Hennepin County, comparing county data to two national samples from the United States and Canada to determine similarities and differences for the scores of each sample on the YLS’s eight domains: Prior and Current Offenses/ Dispositions, Family Circumstances/ Parenting, Education/ Employment, Peer Relations, Substance Abuse, Leisure/ Recreation, Personality/ Behavior, and Attitudes/ Orientation.

Researchers examined average scores to see if youth scored similarly between the Hennepin County and normative samples. They found similar trends, such as higher scores for females compared to males in each sample for the Personality/ Behavior and Family Circumstances/ Parenting domains.

Comparing local data with a normative sample provides an opportunity to explore how youth or system characteristics might explain some differences in scores for the two groups. For example, only 28 percent of the Hennepin County sample was classified as “low risk” for reoffending, while 49 percent of the U.S. sample was classified as “low risk.” The authors note that Hennepin County Juvenile Probation has a policy that prevents low level juvenile offenders from being assessed with the YLS. This likely explains the differences in average risk between the two groups, because most Hennepin County youth who would have scored lower have been excluded from the assessment entirely.

This examination provides a foundation for a full evaluation of the YLS assessment tool. The evaluation will include recidivism data in Hennepin County to determine how well the tool predicts future behavior. If the future evaluation determines that the tool is as predictive of future behavior as it was in national evaluations, it will be validated for use in Hennepin County.
State Spotlight: Connecticut

The Justice Policy Institute has released a report summarizing dramatic changes that have occurred recently in Connecticut’s juvenile justice system. Connecticut has employed a number of tactics to reduce juvenile confinement, including raising the age at which youth are automatically tried as adults.

Some of the key contributors to Connecticut’s success have been the use of evidence-based practices and an increased attention to data collection and analysis. The report includes a summary of six family-based therapies used in Connecticut to address risk factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency, including well-known evidence-based practices such as Functional Family Therapy (FFT), Multisystemic Therapy (MST), and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MDFT).

The state’s reform efforts include reducing court referrals for school misconduct, using screening tools so that youth at lower risk of reoffending and/or committing less serious offenses are not placed in residential confinement, and training law enforcement on DMC issues.

Overall, Connecticut has reduced its residential commitments of youth by 70 percent between 2000 and 2011 without increasing costs. These changes are consistent with the requirements of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA), the key legislation that established the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and set key standards for the juvenile justice system and prevention efforts. According to the report, this progress has been due to an emphasis on the use of evidence-based practices over confinement.

In addition to successes in reducing juvenile confinement and arrest rates, Connecticut has also experienced significant cost savings during the reform efforts. The report notes spending by the Department of Children and Families and the Judicial Branch’s Court Support Services Division during the 2011-2012 fiscal year was $2 million less than these agencies spent ten years earlier.

For greater detail on Connecticut’s recent reforms, read the Justice Policy Institute's full report, or for an overview, access the executive summary.