NJJEC Bulletin May 2013

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, e-mail 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?

NJJEC staff members have created a second narrated slideshow entitled Understanding Juvenile Justice Evaluation Reports. This resource introduces and explains some of the key concepts in juvenile outcome evaluation research, and helps practitioners be able to identify good evaluation reports. This resource and Hiring and Working With An Evaluator are available on the NJJEC Skill-Building Page.

Thanks to all who participated in our webinar, “Making ‘What Works’ Work for You: Evidence-Based Components and Adaptation” on April 25th! We received some fantastic questions. The archived webinar has been posted on the NTTAC site as well the NJJEC Trainings page.

Staff are currently developing our next set of resources on the basics of using spreadsheets to record and analyze evaluation data.

Upcoming Events of Interest

National Children’s Alliance 2013 Leadership Conference
June 2-June 5
The National Children’s Alliance will hold its 2013 Leadership Conference titled, On the Horizon: The Next Chapter in Child Advocacy in Washington, DC June 2 - June 5. The conference provides an education, networking, and advocacy opportunity for leaders in the Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC) movement. Check the website for conference information and to register!

8th Annual National School Safety Conference
July 22-July 26
The School Safety Advocacy Council will host the National School Safety Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, July 22 through 26. Session topics include substance use, school violence, bullying, and mental health. Registration and a tentative schedule are available on the conference website.
Featured Resources: What Works Clearinghouse

Our recent webinar on Evidence-Based Components and Adaptation discussed ways to apply effective strategies for working with youth in new settings, and how to make changes to existing evidence-based program plans to fit a specific context. This broader, components-based approach to evidence-based practice allows juvenile justice practitioners to make use of the knowledge base of other disciplines such as social welfare and education. We discussed the advantages of using this knowledge in the July 2012 and March 2013 editions of the NJJEC Bulletin.

Understanding the processes by which children and teens learn is a key element in changing behavior. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) is a project of the Institute of Education Sciences, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the project is to provide educators with information about best practices. Topics of particular interest to practitioners working with justice-involved youth include dropout prevention and student behavior.

The WWC provides Practice Guides on resolving common problems and issues in school settings, including behavioral problems. The Intervention Reports include topics such as Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies and Social Skills Training. Each report describes the specific intervention and available research, including the quality of the research as determined by WWC’s standards.

Another useful resource provided by the WWC is the What Works Clearinghouse Reporting Guide for Study Authors. This two-page guide provides information about reporting program results, including specific information about the ways program data were collected, how missing data are addressed, and descriptions of baseline data and outcome measures for comparison.

The WWC’s Single Study Reviews assess the quality of a single research study that has been conducted on a program, practice, or policy of interest. These reviews can assist practitioners seeking to understand how to gauge the quality of evaluation studies by discussing the value and shortcoming of different approaches to evaluation. For example, the WWC Review of the Report “High School Students as Mentors: Findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study” outlines the elements of an evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters, including the setting in which the program was implemented, a description of the study’s intervention and comparison groups, and the outcomes and measurement. These reviews also contain a helpful glossary that defines statistical terms in plain language.

Evaluation Feature: Navajo Nation Project Safe Neighborhoods

NJJEC’s most recent webinar, Making “What Works” Work for You: Evidence-Based Components and Adaptation focused on a variety of ways to approach the implementation of best and promising practices in new contexts. Continual review of program implementation—both what is working well and the challenges being faced—is essential to applying evidence-
based approaches in new settings and contexts. An assessment of how well the program is being implemented should include the unique characteristics of the setting and target population, as well as a review of program activities that have been established as planned and those that are facing implementation challenges.

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a promising practice designed to address gun violence. The program includes law enforcement, intervention, and prevention efforts and creates partnerships between government entities and community organizations.

Recently, the New Mexico Statistical Analysis Center located at the University of New Mexico’s Institute for Social Research released a report evaluating the implementation of Project Safe Neighborhoods on Navajo tribal lands in New Mexico. The report, Evaluation of Dlo’ayazhi Project Safe Neighborhoods, discusses some of the unique challenges related to implementing PSN in this setting. The report’s authors used semi-structured interviews with PSN Task Force Members, observations of Task Force meetings, and quarterly written reports to conduct the process evaluation. They examined the specific successes and challenges that occurred while implementing an urban-oriented program in a rural, tribal area.

One of the substantial challenges to implementing PSN identified by the authors was concentrated disadvantage coupled with a lack of infrastructure, making service delivery more difficult than in a populated urban area. Limited resources for tribal law enforcement as well as complications resulting from the intersection of tribal, state, and federal law enforcement jurisdictions were also noted as hurdles to program implementation.

The process evaluation compared and contrasted proposed project activities with current activities. For example, in the area of prevention, proposed activities included school-based Gang Resistance Education And Training (GREAT) and delivering educational sessions in the community. The authors describe the substantial ongoing school- and community-based educational activities that have been carried out with success, but note that GREAT sessions have not continued to occur with regularity.

The report also assesses the successes of collaboration efforts among tribal, state, and federal agencies as well as local community organizations. Task force meetings, the involvement of community partners, and the ability of law enforcement to work across jurisdictions increased collaboration, a key component of the success of PSN. Notable barriers to collaboration included jurisdictional boundaries, limited attendance by some key members, and periodic turnover. General project facilitators included buy-in from involved agencies and other stakeholders, the continuation of the project compared to other short-lived efforts, and the adaptability of the program to involve community members and respond to local needs.

The full report is available online.

Local Spotlight: Maricopa County, AZ

Maricopa County, Arizona has implemented three new strategies in its Juvenile Probation Department to address Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC). These strategies were recently evaluated in a study by Dr. Nancy Rodriguez of Arizona State University and Dr. Elizabeth Eells of the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department in their March 2013

Maricopa County Juvenile Probation began new efforts to reduce the detention population and DMC within detention after assessments and workgroups found racial and ethnic differences in multiple case processing decision points, similar to many jurisdictions.

Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department revised their Detention Index by removing aggravating and mitigating factors, and changing the weight of certain legal factors in the Index. In addition to reducing juvenile detention overall, these changes were expected to reduce the proportion of minority youth in detention.

The Department instituted a new policy requiring supervisor approval for cases in which a probation officer chooses to detain a youth who does not meet the standards for detention according to the Detention Index. The Department also instituted a continuous review policy, such that cases involving detained youth are continually examined for reasons the youth are detained. Probation officers are required to record the reasons the youth is detained, and whether or not the probation officer will recommend release at the youth’s next court appearance. The review policy (Detention Release Reports) practice has been discontinued but continues to inform work around detention reform, specifically the Department’s participation in the statewide Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative.

Rodriguez and Eells’ report states that juvenile referrals have declined since 2007, as have Maricopa probation and detention populations. Further, racial and ethnic differences in court outcomes have declined. Changes to the Detention Index resulted in reductions in the proportion of mandatory detentions. While the likelihood of discretionary detention is still higher for Black youth compared to White youth, the overall number of discretionary detentions has declined since the Department implemented a policy requiring supervisor approval for Detention Index overrides.

The study also included the collection of qualitative data from probation officer interviews. The interviews showed that probation officers had a generally negative perception of the Detention Release Reports, and did not feel that the reports had any effect on length of detention. This assertion was consistent with analysis showing that the average number of days in detention was already declining prior to the 2007 institution of the Detention Release Report, a decline that continued until 2009 when it increased slightly.