Providing Effective Facility-Based Programs and Services

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Programs, services, and approaches must stem from an overarching therapeutic philosophy—i.e., one that facilitates and supports youth development through skill-building and connections to pro-social adults and peers.
Research on Effective Juvenile Justice Programs

Prof. Mark Lipsey’s meta-analysis on juvenile justice programs:
• Analyzed 548 studies on delinquency interventions to determine what works to reduce recidivism
• **Key finding**: Programs with a therapeutic philosophy were much more effective at reducing recidivism than those steeped in programs featuring punishment, surveillance, fear and control.

See: Lipsey, M., et al. (2010). *Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs: A New Perspective on Evidence-Based Programs*
Facility staff must help youth to successfully return to the community and transition to adulthood.

This involves supporting youth to achieve critical developmental tasks, such as:

- Establishing identity and autonomy
- Building competencies
- Developing a sense of belonging

It also involves assisting youth to remove barriers to mainstream life (e.g., improve literacy/employability, reduce substance use).
Core Components of a Positive Youth Justice Approach

1. Opportunities for “Learning/Doing” (Skill Development)
2. Opportunities for “Attaching/Belonging” (Connections to Pro-Social Adults and Peers)

Promoting Skill Development: Best Practice Principles

• Facilities should offer a wide array of skill development opportunities (e.g., academic, career/tech, recreation)
• Facilities should offer evidence-based cognitive-behavioral interventions
• Facilities should feature skill development in its behavior motivation and disciplinary systems
Promoting Pro-Social Connections: Best Practice Principles

- Facilities should define “family” broadly and support ongoing family engagement
- Facilities should connect youth to community-based supporters and programs (e.g., mentors, volunteers)
- Facilities should offer youth pro-social group opportunities (e.g., youth councils, musical groups, debate teams)
- Facility programs and policies should encourage staff to build positive relationships with youth
Implementing a Facility-Based Developmental Approach

- **Safety is paramount**—youth and staff must feel physically and psychologically safe
- **Fairness is essential**—youth’s perceptions of fairness impact their engagement
- **The environment matters**—the facility’s physical space should be warm and vibrant
- **Multi-disciplinary coordination is vital**—staff across disciplines (custody, education, medical, behavioral health, etc.) must be trained in the developmental approach and regularly communicate and collaborate with one another
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