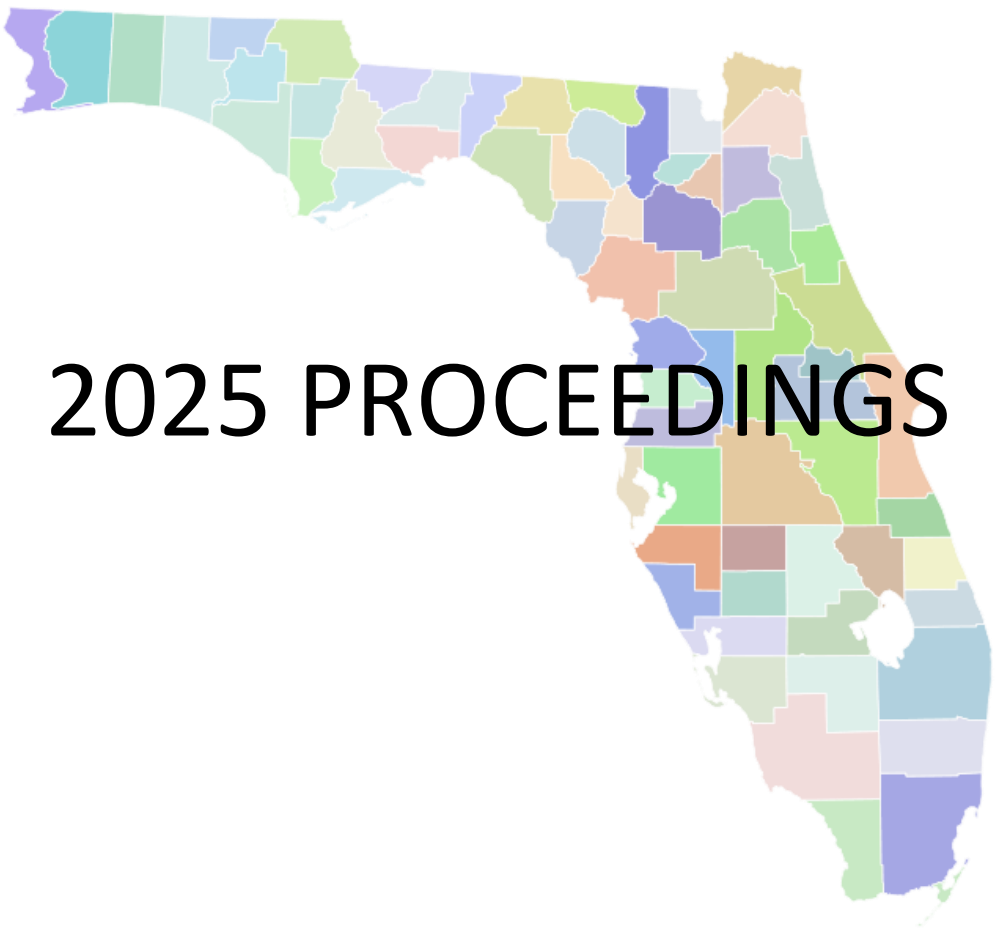




2025 PROCEEDINGS



NATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM
ON JUVENILE SERVICES
COURAGE TO CHANGE

ORLANDO FLORIDA

A publication of the National Partnership for Juvenile Services

National Partnership for Juvenile Services

Conference Organizers

Abby Schrum, Pennsylvania

Licia Lentz, Ed.D., Pennsylvania

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2025 NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON JUVENILE SERVICES

October 1-3, 2025

Orlando, Florida, USA

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Publisher: National Partnership for Juvenile Services

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A Welcome from our CEO

Welcome! We are thrilled to welcome you and fellow participants from all over the nation to the 2025 National Symposium on Juvenile Services. The Symposium brings together field experts from across the nation to share innovative program services and real-life solutions to positively impact youth, families, and communities, and contribute to enhanced public safety. As we demonstrate considerable success, we continue to be grounded in our principles that demonstrate our commitment driven by members. This commitment is guided by the following core values:

- Ensuring access to NPJS members as subject matter experts
- Promoting healthy adolescent development and reducing disparities for system-involved youth
- Adopting evidence-informed decision-making within each phase of the juvenile justice system
- Advancing professional skill development for professionals, youth and families

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services is proud to be hosting the 2025 Symposium in Orlando Florida.

Building on previous years, the theme of the 2025 Symposium is Courage to Change. The following topic areas will be the focus;

Improving Systems: Shaping organizational culture through sound policy and practice.

Improving Personnel Performance: Recruiting, training, and retaining quality professionals.

*Improving Youth, Family and Community Outcomes:
Promoting Innovative Strategies to Support Positive Youth Development.*

Improving Access to Resources: Addressing needs of youth with complex mental, physical, and/or other behavioral health needs through cross-system collaboration.

Implementation of Performance Improvement Practices: Demonstrating compliance with local/state/federal mandates.

It is my hope that you take advantage of the wonderful Keynotes, workshops, and networking events and most importantly bring the information shared during the symposium to the youth and families in your care.

Wayne Bear

Wayne R. Bear, MSW

CEO, National Partnership for Juvenile Services

About the Symposium

The Symposium is held in conjunction with NPJS' Leadership Institute. The Institute is designed for current and new/emerging leaders in juvenile justice with a focus toward those leaders in juvenile confinement facilities including juvenile detention, corrections and treatment centers. The Symposium and Leadership Institute include networking and social opportunities to encourage attendees to establish lasting connections with a broad community of colleagues.

Workshop Solicitation and Selection Process

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS) solicits Symposium workshop proposals from its membership, from prior workshop presenters, and from a broad network of partner organizations distributing the call-for-presentations to their respective constituency groups.

On average, the Symposium attracts an audience from 40+ states and U.S. territories and 1-2 foreign countries. The submission of workshop proposals represents an equally geographically diverse audience offering an array of topics focusing on critical issues and/or emerging trends in congregate care facilities, community-based programs, court services, behavioral health, family engagement, educational services for at-risk youth, and much more.

For the 2025 National Symposium on Juvenile Services, 107 proposals were received and reviewed. A total of 43 workshops were invited to be on the agenda along with 10 poster sessions. The review process consists of a committee comprised of the Symposium Content Coordinator, the Chair of the NPJS Training and Professional Development Discipline Group, NPJS President/CEO, as well as the Managing Director of NPJS. The committee strives to create a balanced agenda that addresses the broad range of professional

development needs of the Symposium participants along with a diverse range of perspectives from the field. Presenters are practitioners, academicians, and parent/youth voices with current or prior history with the juvenile justice system.

Submissions to the proceedings did not undergo a review process or editing other than formatting for publication.

Background

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS) is a 501(c)(3) serving juvenile justice professionals across the United States. NPJS was founded in 2004 when four nonprofits merged their respective membership organizations.

- The Council for Educators of At-Risk and Delinquent Youth
- The Juvenile Justice Trainers Association
- The National Association for Juvenile Correctional Agencies
- The National Juvenile Detention Association

Today NPJS serves 8,700+ members spanning juvenile justice services. To better serve the professionals within its membership, NPJS established discipline groups based on member interest and field expertise. These discipline-focused working groups include:

- Behavioral Health / Clinical Services
- Court Services
- Community-Based Services
- Education of At-Risk and Delinquent Youth
- Staff Training & Professional Development
- Short Term Placement / Juvenile Detention
- Long Term Residential / Juvenile Corrections
- Family Engagement

In addition to the annual Symposium and Leadership Institute, NPJS sponsors the Journal of Applied Juvenile Justice Services, a refereed multi-disciplinary publication.

NPJS Board of Directors

Wayne R. Bear - *President/CEO*

Dipesh Chauhan - *Chairman of the Board / 1st Vice-President & Chair of Community-Based Services Discipline Group*

Terri Hanton - *2nd Vice-President & Chair of Short-Term Detention / Shelter Services*

Helen Avis, Ph.D. – *Board Secretary & Chair of Educational Services*

Keisha Isaacs – *Board Treasurer & Chair of Staff Training & Professional Development*

Theodore Ryle, LICSW, MSW – *Chair of Behavioral Health & Clinical Services*

Greg Sumpter, Ph.D. – *Chair of Court Services*

Johnny Muñoz – *Chair of Long Term Residential / Juvenile Corrections*

Kathy Wright - *Appointed Representative, Chair of Family & Youth Engagement*

Dr. Keith Cruise - *Appointed Representative, Research Services*

Anthony F. Andrisano, Jr. - *Appointed Representative, Legal Services*

Melissa Valentine - *Appointed Representative, Financial Services*

Michael A. Jones - *Managing Director, Liaison, Child & Youth Care Certification Board*

Advisors

Earl L. Dunlap - *Ex-Officio, Senior Advisor / Leadership Emeritus*

David W. Roush, Ph.D. - *Ex-Officio, Senior Advisor / Leadership Emeritus*

Carol Cramer Brooks - *Senior Advisor / Staff and Program Development*

Juan Sepulveda - *Ex-Officio, Interstate Compact for Juveniles*

NPJS Supporting Organizations, Collaborative Partners, and Corporate Members

Abraxas Youth and Family Services

American Institutes for Research

Art Education Partnership

Ascend Career Services

Bob Barker

Buchanan, Ingersoll & Rooney

Bucks County (PA) Juvenile Detention Center

Catalyze Justice
Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice
The Conover Group
CORE - Creating Our Reality
Critical Data Group
Gulf Coast Trades Center
Jett Corrections Consulting
JusticeWorks YouthCare
Lancaster (PA) Youth Intervention Center
Manhattan Strategy Group
Mel Brown & Associates
New Jersey Parents' Caucus
New York State Office of Children & Family Services
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Orijin
Planet Technologies
The Bradley Center
ViaPath Technologies
Wayne Halfway House, Inc.

Conference Organizing Committee

Wayne Bear, Pennsylvania
Michael Jones, Kentucky
Abby Schrum, Pennsylvania
Licia Lentz, Ed.D., Pennsylvania
Keisha Isaacs, Illinois
Dixie Fosler, Florida

Agenda

Tuesday, September 30

5:30 pm – 7:30 pm Welcome Reception + Exhibitor Showcase

Wednesday, October 1

7:30 am – 5:00 pm Registration

7:30 am – 8:30 am Breakfast + Exhibitor Showcase

8:30 am – 10:15 am General Session

10:15 am – 10:45 am Coffee Break + Exhibitor Showcase

10:45 am – 12:15 pm Discipline Group Networking Session and
Workshops

12:15 pm – 1:45 pm Lunch

2:00 pm – 3:15 pm Concurrent Workshops

3:15 pm – 3:45 pm Refreshment Break + Exhibitor Showcase

3:45 pm – 5:00 pm Concurrent Workshops

Thursday, October 2

8:00 am – 5:00 pm Registration

8:00 am – 9:00 am Breakfast + Exhibitor Showcase

9:00 am – 10:15 am Concurrent Workshops

10:15 am – 10:45 am Coffee Break + Exhibitor Showcase

10:45 am – 12:00 pm Concurrent Workshops

12:00 pm – 1:45 pm	General Session Awards Luncheon General Membership Meeting
1:45 pm – 2:45 pm	General Session Poster Session Exhibitor Showcase Coffee Break
2:45 pm – 4:00 pm	Concurrent Workshops
2:45 pm – 5:00 pm	Exhibitor Teardown

Friday, October 3

8:00 am – 11:30 am	Registration
8:00 am – 9:30 am	General Session Breakfast Closing Keynote
9:45 am – 11:00 am	Concurrent Workshops

About the Keynote & General Session Speakers

National Partnership for Juvenile Services claims no copyright ownership over the biographies of the Keynote and General Session Speakers.

Wayne Bear

President/CEO, NPJS

Mr. Wayne Bear is the President/CEO of the National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS). Prior to his current role in NPJS, Mr. Bear was President of the National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) and Chairperson of the Critical Issues and Policy Direction Committee, which is responsible for developing and promulgating all of the Position Statements for the organization. Mr. Bear's fifty plus year career path includes work as a detention front line staff, juvenile probation officer, residential program management and private practice as a licensed social worker and recently most recently as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Partnership for Juvenile Services (PPJS) formerly known as JDCAP.

Mr. Bear saw his initial involvement in NPJS as an opportunity to be an advocate for front line professionals who were constantly facing external criticisms and viewed as opponents to justice reform. Wayne quickly became involved in projects to build collaboration between jurisdictions and to reframe the concept of "juvenile justice system" to be inclusive of service providers, community resources and family. This approach has helped develop a more comprehensive approach to better position youth and family's access to a continuum of care that leads to lasting positive change.

In both his role as the Chairperson of the Critical Issues Committee and now as the CEO of NPJS, Mr. Bear has unwaveringly focused the organization's activities toward achieving their mission engaging field experts to disseminate the groundbreaking research, to engage in networking opportunities to share best practices, to facilitate training on the most current approaches to child care, and to create position statements that inform decision-makers who are needed to fund and support our member efforts. All of these efforts focused on the sole purpose of ensuring a high-quality continuum of services from in-home diversionary projects to and including out-of-home care for the most high-risk, high-need youth.

Berny Jacques

Representative, Florida House of Representatives

Representative Berny Jacques is a dedicated legislator serving District 59 in the Florida House of Representatives, which includes Largo, parts of Seminole, Pinellas Park, and unincorporated Clearwater. Berny holds a Bachelor's in History and Political Studies from Washington Adventist University and a Juris Doctor from Stetson University College of Law. Berny's legal career spans roles as an Assistant State Attorney and civil litigation attorney. His achievements include recognition as a "Legal Elite" by Florida Trend (2016) and a "Rising Star" by Super Lawyers (2018).

Beyond his legal work, Representative Jacques is deeply committed to community service, formerly serving as a staff member at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Tampa Bay for nearly 8 years and as a mentor for over 10 years. His public service record includes appointments by Governor Ron DeSantis to the Sixth Circuit Judicial Nominating Commission and by Sheriff Bob Gualtieri to the Pinellas County Sheriff's Civil Service Board.

Since his election, Representative Jacques has been active in championing reforms through impactful legislation. Notable achievements include HB 1451, granting law enforcement greater authority to investigate crimes in Department of Corrections facilities, HB 1291, ensuring teacher preparation programs are free of divisive ideologies, and HB 1181, which enhances accountability for minors in illegal firearm possession. He also sponsored HB 415, creating a comprehensive resource website for expectant parents. Additionally, his work on SB 1036 ensures stricter penalties for criminal illegal aliens, underscoring his commitment to public safety.

For the 2025-2026 Legislative Session, Representative Jacques serves as Chair of the Careers & Workforce Subcommittee, leading efforts to expand economic opportunities and workforce development. Representative Jacques is a member of the Education & Employment Committee, Security & Threat Assessment Committee, Criminal Justice Subcommittee, Justice Budget Subcommittee, and Insurance & Banking Subcommittee. These assignments reflect his commitment to public safety, education, and economic growth for Floridians.

A proud Seminole resident, Berny remains focused on creating a safer, stronger, and more prosperous Florida.

Haley Hunt

CEO/ Founder, The VERB Kind

Haley Hunt is the founder of The VERB Kind, a nonprofit organization transforming the lives of incarcerated youth through consistent mentorship, leadership development, and the power of hope. Driven by a passion for justice, redemption, and second chances, Haley has mobilized thousands of volunteers to serve inside juvenile detention centers across the country.

Her work equips mentors and empowers young people—reminding them of their worth, potential, and the possibility of a future beyond their circumstances.

A sought-after speaker and compelling storyteller, Haley brings strategy, authenticity, and inspiration to audiences across sectors—spanning education, criminal justice, corporate, and faith-based spaces. Her work has been featured by ESPN, the NFL Players Association, and multiple national platforms focused on youth justice reform.

Haley believes real change happens when we show up consistently, love deeply, and speak life boldly. She resides in Florida and continues to lead efforts that bridge communities with the often-forgotten youth behind bars—restoring hope where the world least expects it.

Licia Lentz

Allegheny Intermediate Unit

Dr. Licia Lentz is a distinguished, veteran educator of 25 years who serves as the Director of Alternative Education for the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU). The Alternative Education Program (AEP) educates students in two AEDY approved community schools in Allegheny County. The AEP promotes lasting success by emphasizing and teaching to each learner's strengths and abilities. They educate the whole-child in a safe and supportive school environment through restorative and trauma-informed approaches grounded in meaningful relationships with students, staff, families and community.

Previously, Dr. Lentz was the statewide regional school improvement team manager for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In that role, she supported 96 schools across the Commonwealth that were designated for

Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) through ESSA. Prior to, Dr. Lentz also has held various leadership positions in school districts throughout the Greater Pittsburgh Region serving as a teacher, assistant principal, curriculum coordinator and assistant superintendent.

Dr. Lentz holds a business degree from Washington and Jefferson College, as well as graduate degrees in administrative and policy studies from the University of Pittsburgh, where her dissertation focused on student discipline and restorative practices. An avid sports fan who competed as a collegiate basketball player, Dr. Lentz spends her time outside of work supporting local sports teams and being a proud mother to her daughter, Juliana.

Jason Wang

Founder & CEO, FreeWorld

Jason's work in the criminal justice space started at the age of 15. He was arrested for a 1st degree felony, Aggravated Robbery, and was given a 12-year sentence at a maximum-security juvenile prison in Texas. While incarcerated, he had an opportunity to work closely with Will Harrell, an Independent Ombudsman appointed by the Governor of Texas, to create sweeping policy changes across the prison agency to create better rehabilitative conditions for incarcerated youth in the State. As a result of this work, Jason was released early with a full scholarship to any University in Texas.

Jason earned two Master degrees from UT Dallas and became the first person in his family to graduate from college. Despite this, employers would not hire Jason due to his criminal history. At his lowest points, Jason considered recommitting crime just to be able to put food on the table.

With the support of Matt Mochary, Jason Green, and Andy Bromberg, FreeWorld was born. FreeWorld is a tech nonprofit that aims to accelerate our society towards a more just, justice system. Today, that means training and placing returning citizens into family sustaining careers in the trucking industry and developing Reentry technology for partners in the field.

Keynotes & General Session Presentations

Opening Keynote & Welcome

General Session | Opening Remarks

Wayne Bear, President/CEO, NPJS

*Berny Jacques, Representative, Florida House of
Representatives*

Hayley Hunt, CEO/ Founder, The VERB Kind

Licia Lentz, Allegheny Intermediate Unit

Purpose Over Pressure: Why Your Presence Still Changes Everything

General Session | Opening Keynote

Hayley Hunt, CEO/ Founder, The VERB Kind

ABSTRACT

In a field where burnout is high, heartbreak is real, and progress can feel invisible, it's easy to wonder: Does any of this even matter? This keynote is a soul-level reminder that it does. Powerfully.

Haley Hunt, founder of The VERB Kind, brings a raw, real, and reinvigorating message to those on the front lines of the juvenile justice system. With stories from inside detention centers, personal moments of discouragement, and the unshakable truth that love in action is never wasted, This isn't just motivation—it's fuel for the journey. Because when you show up, even tired and discouraged, you are planting seeds that grow into second chances, restored futures, and ripple effects that stretch far beyond the walls of any facility.

Awards Luncheon

General Session | Awards Luncheon

Wayne Bear, President/CEO, NPJS

Licia Lentz, Allegheny Intermediate Unit

Dipesh Chauhan, NPJS Board Member

"A Second Chance to Provide Second Chances to Others"

General Session | Closing Keynote

Jason Wang, Founder & CEO, FreeWorld

ABSTRACT

Jason's work in the criminal justice space started at the age of 15. He was arrested for a 1st degree felony, Aggravated Robbery, and was given a 12-year sentence at a maximum security juvenile prison in Texas. While incarcerated, he had an opportunity to work closely with Will Harrell, an Independent Ombudsman appointed by the Governor of Texas, to create sweeping policy changes across the prison agency to create better rehabilitative conditions for incarcerated youth in the State. As a result of this work, Jason was released early with a full scholarship to any University in Texas.

Jason earned two Master degrees from UT Dallas and became the first person in his family to graduate from college. Despite this, employers would not hire Jason due to his criminal history. At his lowest points, Jason considered recommitting crime just to be able to put food on the table.

With the support of Matt Mochary, Jason Green, and Andy Bromberg, FreeWorld was born. FreeWorld is a tech nonprofit that aims to accelerate our society towards a more just, justice system. Today, that means training and placing returning citizens into family sustaining careers in the trucking industry and developing Reentry technology for partners in the field.

Discipline Group Networking Sessions and Workshops

Co-Regulation in Action: Building Resilient, Trauma-Informed Connections in Juvenile Justice

Discipline Group | Behavioral Health & Clinical Services

*Ginger Healy, LCSW, Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc.,
Program Director LCSW*

ABSTRACT

This session will explore the importance of creating environments that prioritize the brain and nervous system to address the needs of children in the juvenile justice system. We'll discuss how early adversity and stress can rewire a child's brain, leading to challenging behaviors and emotional difficulties. By focusing on safe, attuned relationships, we can foster emotional stability and promote regulation. The session will highlight the power of co-regulation—when staff model and support emotional stability—helping both youth and professionals thrive. We'll examine how a child's dysregulation can manifest in stress responses like fight, flight, freeze, or fawn, and the importance of recognizing subtle signs of stress. Participants will learn strategies for adapting regulation principles to each child's unique needs, rewiring patterns of stress and trauma, and enhancing resilience. This session offers practical approaches to building stronger, healthier connections that lead to better outcomes for children, families, and juvenile justice professionals.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Bridging the Gap: Aligning Youth Aspirations with Real-World Opportunities

Discipline Group | Community-Based Services

Vera Jackson, Viapath Technologies

*Jessica Artz, ViaPath Technologies, Executive Vice President
and Chief Human Resource Officer*

ABSTRACT

Youth participating in career development programs often enter with high aspirations, but a limited understanding of the job market and the pathways required to achieve their goals. Many express interests in popular or idealized careers—such as entertainment, professional sports, or high-paying tech jobs—without a realistic sense of the education, skills, and experience needed to access those fields. This disconnect can stem from a lack of exposure, minimal guidance from adults with workforce knowledge, and the influence of social media-driven perceptions of success.

Career development programs play a critical role in bridging this gap by helping youth explore a broader range of careers, assess their strengths and interests, and understand the steps required for long-term success. This workshop explores the disconnect between the career aspirations of at-risk youth and the realities of the job market, particularly for entry-level positions accessible to their age and experience level. Many young people enter the job market with ambitious goals—often influenced by social media, pop culture, or limited exposure to the world of work—yet lack a clear understanding of the education, skills, and steps required to reach those careers. This gap often results in frustration, disengagement, and missed opportunities—and contributes significantly to the high rates of youth unemployment.

Through interactive discussion and case-based examples, participants will learn strategies to guide youth toward realistic, age-appropriate career pathways while still honoring their interests and long-term goals. The session will also highlight tools and approaches for building workplace readiness, fostering informed decision-making, and introducing career options youth may not have considered. Attendees will leave with actionable insights to

help young people navigate the early stages of employment and develop a sustainable vision for their future.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Using an Assessment Center Model to Enhance Arrest Processing and Diversion Off-Ramps

Discipline Group | Court Services

*Molli Cook, National Assessment Center Association,
Executive Director*

ABSTRACT

In this workshop you will learn how a large urban jurisdiction, like Philadelphia – overhauled arrest processing to make it more trauma responsive for youth and their families and created more diversion off-ramps, by integrating police & civilians in this early intervention model. You will hear how the model came to be, about the first year of outcomes and how Philadelphia intends to continue to develop this model to further efficiencies and enhancements system wide.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Working With a Multigenerational Workforce

Discipline Group | Detention/Short Term Shelter

*Richard Gentry, Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility,
Director of Training*

ABSTRACT

This workshop will address some of the emerging issues that leaders will need to address in the post pandemic era and with the implementation of Raise the Age (RTA). The workshop will address some of the most effective leadership principles and concepts as it relates to working with a multi-generational workforce. We will identify various experiences and commonalities among the 4 generations in the workforce and how to best relate and work with them. This workshop will also help leaders identify the most productive employees and how to effectively work with them. Leaders will be challenged to think outside the box in order connect with their staff and obtain maximum productivity from them.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Engaging Justice-Involved Youth and Family Member Session

Discipline Group | Family Engagement

Dallas Crosby, NJPC

Chris Akor, New Jersey Courts, Legal Intern

Supreet Minhas, NJ Parents' Caucus, Youth Justice Initiative Advocate

Duvall Ricks, New Jersey Parents' Caucus, Youth Advocate Leader

ABSTRACT

The engaging justice-involved youth and family member session will aid organizations to work effectively with parents, family members, youth, and young adults who are involved in the Youth Justice system. The session will provide information on developing family-specific strategies, and partnering with family members, youth, and young adults. The audience will engage in conversations with youth advocate leaders, and discuss social media strategies, and the role of youth and families in Youth Justice Reform. They will also discuss developing family and youth-driven materials for their organization and state.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Holistic Supports for Justice-Impacted Youth: A Community College Providing Extensive State-Wide Programming and Mentorship For Youth

Discipline Group | Educators of At-Risk/Delinquent Youth

*Alexandra Fields, Center for Justice-Impacted Students,
Middlesex College*

*Spencer McCray, Middlesex College's Center for Justice-
Impacted Students, Program Lead and Enrollment Navigator*

*Brandon Lugo, Center for Justice-Impacted Students,
Middlesex College*

ABSTRACT

Participants will learn how Middlesex College, a community college in Central New Jersey, collaborates with county and state level agencies, including juvenile probation, juvenile detention centers, and the state's juvenile justice commission, to provide a wealth of higher educational opportunities to court-involved youth. Specifically, we will highlight our trauma-informed diversion programming for youth probationers, programming we provide to pre-adjudicated youth within juvenile detention centers, and the state-wide degree pathway that we operate for detained adjudicated youth.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Catch and Don't Release: Implementing Practices that Build and Retain Talent

Discipline Group | Juvenile Corrections/Long-Term Residential

Michele Boguslofski, Teaching Family Association, Executive Director

ABSTRACT

Quality of care and services is determined by quality of staff. An effective model delivered with fidelity requires a team of consistent, qualified, and dedicated professionals. According to research by Work Institute and Benefit news in 2023, nearly 38% of employees quit within the first year of employment and of those, over 40% of employees who leave within the first year do so in the first 90 days. Further, it costs 33% of an employee's salary to replace them.

Outcome-driven strategies that lead to better hiring decisions and retain staff drastically improve both recruitment and retention. Establishing systems that measure and enhance the effectiveness of leaders and managers, and create sustainability around process versus person, assure better practice and results. When applied routinely, staff are more satisfied and successful, managers are more proactive and productive, accountability is improved, and risk can be reduced. More important, overall standards are raised across the agency - for those doing the work and persons receiving services.

The session will focus on practical ways to improve hiring, retention and improve overall quality. Purposeful management and leadership practices and systems will be discussed.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Workshops

Use of a Risk Assessment (Nebraska Youth Screen) to Guide Prosecutor Decisions and Diversion Case Plans

Interactive Workshop | Court Services

Laura Suhr, Lancaster County Human Services, Assessment Specialist

Keywords: Medicaid, JJDP, youth justice reform

ABSTRACT

Lancaster County uses the Nebraska Youth Screen (NYS) to guide the County Attorney's decision making on juvenile cases that are eligible for diversion to best align the youth with most appropriate intervention. Low risk youth will usually have their charge dropped and receive a warning letter. Moderate to high-risk youth will be referred to diversion or have their charge filed in court. The NYS is then used by diversion to create a case plan that targets areas of need and to not over or under serve youth.

Presentation will discuss strategies for conducting interviews with parents and youth to accurately and consistently score a risk assessment. Presentation will also include data showing how the NYS is utilized in the decision making process by the County Attorney and in diversion case planning. Data exploring the effectiveness of the NYS in how it predicts outcomes for youth will be presented.

CORRESPONDENCE

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From Macro to Micro: How Technology Can Be a Tool for Telling the Story

Interactive Workshop | Technology

*Carlie Binzer, Florida Network of Youth and Family Services,
Data Coordinator*

*Jeniffer Abdullah, Florida Network of Youth and Family
Services, Director of Data and Research*

Keywords: An initial search of “technology”, “social work or nonprofit”, “database improvement” via Web of Science resulted in 63 studies conducted in the past ten years within the United States. However, adjusting the search to “technology or database”, “social work or nonprofit”, and “improvement” captures a more comprehensive list of relevant literature (n=1,396).

ABSTRACT

"From Macro to Micro: How Technology Can Be a Tool for Telling the Story" will share practical advice about navigating systematic improvements, building partnerships with developers, and how this connects to "telling the story" using data through reports, visualizations, and informing decisions. The Florida Network of Youth and Family Services completed three projects in prior version of the statewide database ahead of working on an overall system rebuild in 2022-2023. These projects included switching the server, creating a new risk and needs assessment, and creating a locking system to improve data quality. The process of redevelopment involved requirements gathering meetings, testing, and technical assistance. In those years, a strong partnership was built with the development team who have continued to work with the Florida Network in creating enhancements and supporting new contract needs. The session will conclude showing how investing in these system improvements leads to data that can take agencies further in providing comprehensive data storytelling, and opportunities to improve.

OVERVIEW

The data team at the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services is comprised of Jeniffer Abdullah, Carlie Binzer, and Cori Blomberg. With their combination of lived experiences, educational backgrounds, skillsets, and passion for helping others, they have been able to complete complex projects, identify opportunities for automation or improvements, and use data in ways that have not been done prior at their agency.

MACRO

In 2019, the Florida Network began working with a development team which conducted a technology audit to provide a perspective of opportunities to improve the Network Management Information System, colloquially known as NetMIS. Two of the technology audits proposals were completed in the months following. The first project was shifting the server for the database from a physical one to a cloud-based solution. This decision was based on cost, security, and accessibility. The next project was a “locking system” designed to ensure data accuracy in the monthly invoicing process. Once invoicing was completed, database changes were prohibited unless explicitly authorized through an unlock feature available upon request to the Florida Network. This project was more involved because it shifted practice and involved ongoing awareness of this new feature. It continued to build upon a positive working relationship between the development team and the Florida Network.

Shortly after the locking system was introduced, development pivoted to the NIRVANA® (Network Inventory of Risks, Victories, and Needs Assessment) which was developed by Dr. Michael Baglivio and Kathy Jackowski. This project was even more multifaceted, with its own set of alert messages, business rules and different types of assessments that could be conducted at different time periods.

Following the successes and learned lessons of these projects, the Florida Network underwent a database rebuild that took close to a year. From a macro-perspective, the database’s infrastructure was rebuilt to support future program growth and invoicing processes. It also involved agency feedback throughout the duration of the project, with many requirements gathering meetings bringing subject matter experts (often, those using the database or working with youth and doing data entry) to

the table with developers and the Florida Network. These strategies reduced assumptions made and often reduced iterations of features needing to be changed.

The trade-off of involving other stakeholders was time, which is a finite resource and became challenging to manage towards the end of the project. However, there were significant benefits in intentionally hearing other perspectives along the process. Testing of the features happened in cycles during the project, with a “User Acceptance Testing” period for the final months prior to “Go Live” of the new database.

Technical assistance and training were also an investment of time resources. Frequent meetings were available to agency data administrators onboarding their agencies using the new database features. Additionally, materials were available in an asynchronous format for all users, data administrators, and for specific functions of the system, such as invoicing. In the following years, additional tip sheets and review guides have been produced to support the usability of the system. Long-term, there is a plan to provide an overall database manual and “data dictionary” for agency staff.

In the year that followed the NetMIS deployment, supportive enhancements were prioritized both with partner agency staff and Florida Network staff to formulate a plan of what would be possible to update in the system. These updates provided further agency buy-in as the agency staff were able to see many of their concerns and ideas translated into tangible updates.

MICRO

On a micro-level, data analysis and reporting advanced in the past decade. Querying using SQL (“structured query language”) provided more data analysis compared to primarily using Microsoft Excel. Between 2023 and 2025, data visualization tools have provided even more benefits, as they can assist with analysis, reporting, and automation. Within the Florida Network, Power BI is used regularly for reports that need to be produced in PDF format for stakeholders as well as for reports completed on a schedule to supplement invoicing. Tableau is typically used when sharing materials with agency staff to filter data based on their needs and can be slightly more dynamic. The pros and cons of visualization tools, generally,

come down to purpose, audience, and cost. Ultimately the cost-benefit must consider the data quality to justify investment into these tools.

When able to control the data source, it is possible to increase the veracity and handle a growing volume of data. With an increased overall value, the data can be visualized clearly, and otherwise unseen insights can be extracted. The system's adaptability provides value for the data and the capability to iterate and collect customized data points. These factors support the data workflow becoming more efficient and the availability of more reporting options.

PARTING THOUGHTS

In summary, investing in technological updates can provide benefit to long-term data reporting and analysis capabilities. While many technology projects fail (Andriole, 2022), a combination of having stakeholder "buy-in", a team of caring individuals who can translate the technical language to staff (from direct-support staff to leadership), and intentionality supported the successes of the Florida Network's projects in recent years. The workshop presentation will attempt to demonstrate these items through a "choose-your-own-adventure" interactive activity combined with an opportunity to discuss how these experiences could translate to other practice settings.

It should be noted that there is no "one size fits all" solution for data processes (including reporting and analysis) at similar agencies. While many of the projects completed in recent years are considered successes in terms of how they benefited practice, there were also opportunities identified through feedback at all levels, like ensuring training materials adapt as updates are made to the system. Creating space for feedback and documenting feedback has also been helpful for supporting a positive data culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Paula Moreno and John Robertson from the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services for their support and assistance with our workshop paper and presentation content.

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The Village in Action: Experiential Collaboration in Juvenile Justice

Interactive Workshop | Behavioral Health

Romita Sillitti, DC Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, Supervisory Health Services Program Manager
Douglas White, National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS), Consultant
Rashida George, Founder and Consultant, Institute for a Restorative Future

ABSTRACT

The importance of multidisciplinary collaboration is well documented in research literature regarding effective treatment interventions in juvenile justice settings. According to a recent poll conducted by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC), leadership within correctional institutions identified collaboration amongst disciplines to be a significant concern along with substance use and suicide prevention. These results clearly reflect the immense efforts needed to successfully coordinate across divisions, suggesting true collaboration is likely easier said than done. This team has previously introduced comprehensive, facility-wide initiatives designed to promote interdepartmental communication and partnership in juvenile justice. In this subsequent session, we challenge traditional approaches to cultural change by moving beyond discussion and engaging participants in practical strategies for collaboration. Specifically, we will offer experiential opportunities for deeper understanding of these approaches to foster community amongst diverse teams, promote critical professional reflection, and integrate education as well as coaching into daily operations of juvenile detention.

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Supporting Incarcerated and Systems Impacted Youth- K-12 to College

Interactive Workshop | Education

Shani Shay, Director and Founder Incarceration to College and Pathways to College

Keywords: Educational equity, incarcerated youth, college access, Black Feminist Pedagogy, credible messenger, reentry support

ABSTRACT

This session explores effective strategies for engaging incarcerated and system-impacted youth from K-12 through higher education. Utilizing the evidence-based methods of The Incarceration to College program and The Underground Scholars program, participants will gain insights into best practices for supporting educational access, retention, and success for these students. By addressing key barriers and implementing proven interventions, educators, mentors, and advocates will learn how to create pathways that foster academic achievement and personal growth for system-impacted youth.

Introduction & Background

Incarcerated youth, especially Black and Brown adolescents, face extreme systemic barriers to education. Nationally, only 6% of incarcerated youth reenroll in school after release, and less than 2% complete a college degree. Yet, educational aspiration among incarcerated youth remains high (Flowers, 2003). Programs like ITC and USI have leveraged culturally responsive pedagogy, early college access, and credible messenger mentorship to increase college-going rates and reduce recidivism (Wiggans, 2017; Shay, 2021).

Founded and directed by Shani Shay, ITC has served over 700 incarcerated youth in the Bay Area, supporting over 100 college transitions—including the first incarcerated youth to be accepted into UC

Berkeley and the first to transition directly from high school to a UC. These outcomes are not coincidental, they reflect a liberatory, culturally grounded approach to pedagogy that centers student voice, identity, and systemic transformation.

Methods

The findings are based on an IRB-informed pilot study conducted in 2021 inside John A. Davis Juvenile Hall in Contra Costa County. Surveys (administered in AAVE to honor student voice) gathered data from six incarcerated youth who had participated in ITC. The survey measured educational aspirations, perceived relevance of instructors and curriculum, and emotional responses such as feeling affirmed or loved.

Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to assess the impact of ITC's core pedagogical strategies:

- Use of culturally relevant, credible messengers
- Relevance of college access and exploration information to incarcerated youth
- Integration of anti-racist and socio-critical curriculum
- Classroom affirmations and ethic of care

Results

- Educational Aspiration: 83.3% of youth surveyed aspired to earn a college degree (BA or higher).
- Instructor Identity & Impact: 100% of students reported that the instructor's identity (previously incarcerated, culturally relevant) increased their engagement.
- Curriculum Relevance: 100% found the curriculum relevant to their lives.
- Love and Affirmation: 83.3% reported feeling love in the ITC classroom; 66.7% recalled receiving an affirmation or compliment in the past 30 days.

Youth comments described the program as “really good,” “helpful,” and capable of “changing people’s lives.” These findings align with broader research showing that culturally grounded pedagogy and access to higher

education reduce recidivism and improve youth outcomes (Austria, 2017; Nurse, 2003).

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

The Incarceration to College model demonstrates that when incarcerated youth are met with love, affirmation, and culturally grounded teaching, their educational aspirations thrive- even behind bars. Programs like ITC challenge the school-to-prison pipeline and offer a path toward academic liberation, grounded in the lived experience and wisdom of previously incarcerated leaders.

Key takeaways:

- Early college outreach inside juvenile facilities is essential.
- Youth respond best to credible messengers who reflect their lived experience.
- Access to rigor and information is needed to align with incarcerated youths educational goals
- Educational spaces must be places of love, affirmation, and radical possibility.

This work affirms that liberation through education is not only possible—it is already happening. Scaling this model nationally could transform outcomes for tens of thousands of incarcerated and systems-impacted youth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to the youth of Contra Costa, Alameda, San Francisco, and Marin Counties. Thank you to the educators, life coaches, and Underground Scholars who walk with our youth. Special thanks to the Berkeley Underground Scholars who developed a pipeline that created the opportunity for Incarceration to College and to Professors Tolani A. Britton and Ugo Nwokeji for their mentorship and guidance.

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Four Pillars of Detention: Ensuring Effective and Compassionate Youth Management

Interactive Workshop | Secure Care

David Nunez, Administration for Children Services, Senior Director of Practice Improvement

ABSTRACT

To equip juvenile justice staff with practical, trauma-informed strategies aligned with the four pillars of detention (Safety, Security, Order, and Care) for effectively managing behavior, crisis, group dynamics, and mental health needs in a compassionate, structured environment.

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What's Going On: Retention in Detention

Interactive Workshop | Secure Care

Willie Fullilove, NPJS, Embedded Consultant

Mark Hameltt, NPJS, Embedded Consultant

*Richard Gentry, Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility,
Director of Training*

ABSTRACT

The current staffing crisis faced by juvenile confinement facilities nationwide contributes to agencies' need to rethink their pre-service and in-service training and transfer of learning approach for staff at all levels of the organization. The reality of the job market is that agencies hire individuals who lack experience working in a confinement facility or with this youth population and do not possess the specific skill sets required to implement programs and operations effectively. Individuals are often quickly promoted to mid-level management and leadership positions to fill vacancies, sometimes before being fully prepared. In both instances, these issues can be addressed with quality training tailored to the necessary skills for meeting job requirements.

Participants attending this workshop will hear how one agency partnered with NPJS to address these issues by creating a new pre-service academy and mid-level management training and providing on-site consulting and coaching for leadership and staff.

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NPJS Critical Issues Priority Planning

Interactive Workshop | Leadership

Wayne Bear, President/CEO, NPJS

ABSTRACT

Quality of care and services is determined by quality of staff. An effective model delivered with fidelity requires a team of consistent, qualified, and dedicated professionals. According to research by Work Institute and Benefit news in 2023, nearly 38% of employees quit within the first year of employment and of those, over 40% of employees who leave within the first year do so in the first 90 days. Further, it costs 33% of an employee's salary to replace them.

Outcome-driven strategies that lead to better hiring decisions and retain staff drastically improve both recruitment and retention. Establishing systems that measure and enhance the effectiveness of leaders and managers, and create sustainability around process versus person, assure better practice and results. When applied routinely, staff are more satisfied and successful, managers are more proactive and productive, accountability is improved, and risk can be reduced. More important, overall standards are raised across the agency - for those doing the work and persons receiving services.

The session will focus on practical ways to improve hiring, retention and improve overall quality. Purposeful management and leadership practices and systems will be discussed.

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From 10 to 25 - A Game of Adolescent Discovery

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Amy Miller, T3 Cloud Technologies

ABSTRACT

From 10 to 25 is a collaborative storytelling game developed by the FrameWorks Institute and the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent to support efforts to change the narrative about adolescence and adolescent development.

To learn more about the period of life we call adolescence, players take on the role of a young person making their way through adolescence by collecting experiences, resources, and relationships that they then turn into discoveries.

It's a game designed to be played by adults who have power and influence in the lives of adolescents: educators, judges, policymakers, community leaders and youth workers—anyone who makes decisions that can affect the lives of young people. Session participants will play the game and debrief as a group to apply the lessons learned to their role in juvenile justice.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Step Up Together: Dancing for Wellness and Youth Engagement

Interactive Workshop | Staff Training

*April Finley, National Partnership for Juvenile Services,
Juvenile Justice Consultant & Trainer*

*Helen Avis, Methodist Home for Children, Administrator of
Education and Research*

ABSTRACT

This lively, interactive workshop brings staff together through line dancing—an accessible, fun, and free activity that builds community and promotes wellness. Designed for all staff roles, the session emphasizes the power of movement as both a trauma-informed self-care strategy and a team-building tool. Line dancing offers structure, rhythm, and joy—elements that can be especially meaningful for justice-involved youth. Participants will learn simple routines, explore ways to incorporate dance into staff wellness initiatives and youth programming, and leave with everything needed to get moving: the steps, the songs, and the inspiration... and a GIFT!

CORRESPONDENCE

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Grief Behind Bars: How Virtual Funeral Access Transforms Juvenile Justice Outcomes

Interactive Workshop | Secure Care

Rolando Nooks, Compassionate Reprieve, Founder and CEO

Keywords: Juvenile justice; grief; traumatic bereavement; secure care; virtual funeral streaming; TGCTA; Beijing Rules; Havana Rules; trauma-informed practice; family engagement

ABSTRACT

This session will explore grief as a hidden trauma in juvenile justice systems and introduce virtual funeral streaming as a restorative intervention for youth in custody. Grieving the loss of a loved one while incarcerated can lead to behavioral regression, depression, and disconnection — yet many systems provide no pathway for mourning. Compassionate Reprieve is the first and only Black-founded nonprofit focused solely on grief access for incarcerated individuals, offering secure, supervised virtual funeral attendance. Participants will learn about real-world implementations of this model in correctional settings, policy implications, and the mental health and behavior outcomes associated with grief-informed practice. The session will also examine cultural considerations, staff engagement, and how technology can be integrated to support youth development and family connection during loss.

Problem Statement and Rationale

Bereavement is near-universal among detained youth, with many losses due to violence. Sixty to seventy percent of these youth meet criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder. Unresolved grief magnifies depression, PTSD, and impulsivity, undermining rehabilitation. Secure virtual funeral access provides both therapy and ritual support.

2) Evidence Base: What We Know About Grief in Custody

Prevalence of bereavement is high, psychiatric comorbidity is common, and traumatic losses undermine learning and behavior. Programs like **Trauma and Grief Component Therapy for Adolescents (TGCTA)** show

measurable reductions in grief symptoms and behavioral incidents, highlighting feasibility even in secure care environments.

3) Policy Foundations: What the Standards Already Require

The Beijing Rules emphasize rehabilitation and family involvement. The Havana Rules guarantee access to healthcare and family contact. Secure, supervised funeral access aligns directly with these international standards.

4) The Model: Secure, Supervised Virtual Funeral Access

Purpose: Allow detained youth to attend funerals virtually.

Core principles: Security-first design, clinical integration, dignity and cultural respect, family partnership. Roles include facility leadership, unit staff, clinicians, and family liaisons.

5) Technical & Security Architecture

Locked-down devices with MDM, just-in-time credentials, TLS encryption, no recording policies, and contingency procedures ensure both security and privacy.

6) Clinical Integration: Before, During, After

Preparation includes grief psychoeducation, coping plans, and family coordination. Attendance occurs in a supervised private space. Post-event debriefing integrates with TGCTA or other supports.

7) Cultural & Ethical Considerations

Funerals are cultural rites. Denying access compounds trauma and inequity. Secure virtual funerals promote dignity, racial equity, and family healing.

8) Legal and Policy Framework

Aligns with Beijing and Havana Rules, ABA trauma-informed guidelines, and policy elements such as eligibility, privacy, supervision, and equity monitoring.

9) Implementation Roadmap

Phase 0: Executive decision.

Phase 1: Design & procurement.

Phase 2: Pilot with 5–10 cases.

Phase 3: Scale-up to all units with equity review.

10) Budget & Operational Planning

One-time pilot costs include hardware, setup, and training. Ongoing costs include staff time, connectivity, and program partner support. Benefits

include reduced incidents, better education continuity, and improved family relations.

11) Measurement and Evaluation

Track behavior, clinical symptoms, education, family connection, and equity. Use matched pre/post comparisons, qualitative debriefs, and published practice briefs.

12) Case Vignettes

Composite stories illustrate positive outcomes for youth who attended funerals virtually, showing improved behavior and emotional regulation.

13) Risks and Mitigations

Risks include security breaches, emotional overwhelm, inequitable access, and tech failure. Mitigations include strict protocols, coping plans, equity audits, and backup connectivity.

14) Policy Recommendations

Codify supervised funeral access as rehabilitative, mandate grief screening, train staff, resource family liaisons, and report outcomes publicly.

CONCLUSION

Grief is central to rehabilitation. Secure virtual funeral access complements therapy and family engagement, fulfilling international standards and improving outcomes. The courageous choice is to make it routine.

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CORRESPONDENCE

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It Takes a Village-Establishing and Maintaining Community Partnerships!

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Tynetta Brown, Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, Director of Volunteer Services

Laurie Leslie, Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, Administrative Analyst I

ABSTRACT

We all know and should know that programming is very vital in a detention setting as well as the community. There is a need for services that deal with behaviors, family development, mental health, legal and etc. The list can go on and on. We will discuss how it takes a Village and how to establish and maintain quality programming in detention settings.

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Roadmap to Reform: Implementing the OBSI Model for Juvenile Justice Operations & Education Reform

Interactive Workshop | Secure Care

Samantha Fuesy, The OBSI Project, President

ABSTRACT

This workshop introduces the OBSI Model, a revolutionary approach to reforming juvenile justice systems through data-driven, environment-first intervention strategies. Instead of treating youth behavior and education, staff shortages, training gaps, and operational inefficiencies as isolated issues, this model reveals and addresses their interconnections. Utilizing customized data dashboards, administrators are empowered to analyze and make data-informed decisions in real time. Employing Precision Teaching and explicit, differentiated instruction, the OBSI model tailors educational interventions to effectively meet the needs of students grouped by behavior or offense rather than academic level. Workshop participants will explore how these integrated strategies not only enhance educational outcomes but also foster systemic improvements across juvenile justice settings. This session offers a comprehensive look at transforming juvenile justice through data-driven decision-making and specialized instructional techniques, creating a more effective and supportive environment for youth.

CORRESPONDENCE

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The Five Stages of Incarceration

Interactive Workshop | Secure

Lester Young, Path2Redemption Training and Consulting, Executive Director

ABSTRACT

The juvenile justice process has five key stages: intake, assessment, confinement, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Intake is the initial stage where juveniles are processed into the system, undergoing evaluations to determine their needs, risk levels, and appropriate placements.

Assessment involves a deeper examination of the juvenile's background, behavior, and potential for rehabilitation, guiding decisions about treatment or counseling.

Confinement refers to the period of detention or placement in juvenile facilities, where youths face the challenges of adapting to restrictive environments while dealing with peer dynamics and institutional rules.

In the rehabilitation stage, juveniles engage in educational programs, therapy, and skill-building activities aimed at addressing the root causes of their behavior and preparing them for reentry.

Finally, reintegration focuses on the transition from the juvenile justice system back into the community, emphasizing support services, family involvement, and mentorship to reduce recidivism and promote successful societal reentry.

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No Matter How Bad it Seems, You Can Always Go Back to SQUAREONE – Engaging Youth, Families, and the Community in Designing a Place to Go in a Time of Crisis

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

*Caroline Steffensmeier, Lancaster County Human Services
Ashley Chism, CenterPointe, Crisis Services Director
Lesley Ahrens, Lincoln Lancaster County Human Services
Diversion Case Worker*

ABSTRACT

The number of youth experiencing behavioral health crises in our communities continues to rise and families are struggling to connect with immediate behavioral health supports and community resources. In response, Lancaster County, Nebraska, relied on the voice of youth and families to inform the establishment of a 24-hours 7 days a week support center with Crisis Response as its focal point. This workshop will explore the increasing need for youth and family supports in our communities, focusing on youth behavioral health and crisis response, while highlighting the value of community and youth voices.

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Aligning Purpose with Practice: Moving from Referees to Coaches

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Brian Lovins, PhD, Justice System Partners, President

ABSTRACT

New initiatives in juvenile justice and human service organizations often fail to achieve intended results, not because the initiative was flawed, but because the implementation processes were not in place to sustain the change. Essentially, these entities are trying to upload new innovations through outdated organizational infrastructures. By understanding and using implementation frameworks, organizations can create an infrastructure that moves new innovations forward and sustains them over time. These drivers for sustaining change include adjustments to hiring practices, training practices, coaching/supervision, use of data, and administrative/systems change. Further, it is essential for organizational leaders to understand and recognize when adaptive and technical leadership strategies are needed. This workshop will show the significant results that can occur when effective implementation processes are used to adopt and sustain evidence-based practices for children and youth.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The juvenile justice system was founded on the principle of rehabilitation, yet current practices often work against this mission. While individual evidence-based practices have been widely implemented, they remain ineffective within organizational structures designed around surveillance and punishment rather than development and support. The challenge lies not in the interventions themselves, but in the "referee" infrastructure that prevents their successful implementation.

The coaching-oriented approach to juvenile justice emerged from recognition that organizational transformation must precede and support individual practice changes. Unlike traditional reform efforts that focus on specific programs or policies, the coaching model addresses the fundamental misalignment between stated mission (helping youth thrive) and daily operations (monitoring compliance and issuing penalties).

THE PROBLEM: SYSTEM MISALIGNMENT

The Current "Referee" System

Juvenile justice agencies currently operate under a "referee model." In this approach, staff function at their core like referees: watching for rule violations, blowing whistles when infractions occur, and issuing penalties. This model creates several systemic problems:

Structural Impossibility of Success: Youth entering the system face numerous competing demands with limited resources. They must maintain employment or school attendance, have a place to live, complete treatment programs, pay fees, and attend frequent check-ins—often with barriers to transportation, family support, or basic stability. The system sets youth up for failure by expecting immediate compliance with all requirements simultaneously.

Focus on Failure Rather Than Growth: Current metrics emphasize monitoring violations over skill development. Success is measured by the absence of problems rather than the presence of positive change. This approach fails to recognize or celebrate incremental progress while magnifying setbacks.

Staff Role Confusion: Line staff experience chronic role conflict between helping and enforcement functions. They entered the field to support youth development but find themselves spending most time documenting failures rather than facilitating growth. This leads to high turnover, burnout, and cynicism among dedicated professionals.

Organizational Infrastructure Problems: Policies, procedures, and performance measures reinforce referee behaviors throughout the organization. Staff are evaluated on compliance monitoring rather than relationship building or behavior change outcomes. Training focuses on technical tasks rather than coaching skills.

Evidence of System Failure

Current data demonstrates the referee model's ineffectiveness. Only 60% of youth successfully complete community supervision across the nation, with technical violations accounting for a significant portion of failure rather than new delinquent behavior.

THE SOLUTION: A COACHING-ORIENTED APPROACH TO JUVENILE JUSTICE

Theoretical Foundation

A coaching-oriented approach rests on two core beliefs: first, that all youth have the capacity to change, grow, and thrive; second, that juvenile justice staff are responsible for helping youth develop pathways to success. These beliefs require fundamental shifts in organizational culture, structure, and practice. Effective coaches invest in their players' success by assessing strengths and growth areas, developing skills systematically, maintaining belief in potential even during setbacks, and measuring their own success by their players' achievements.

ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION COMPONENTS

Infrastructure Realignment: Agencies need to undertake an organizational deep-dive to identify policies, procedures, and practices that reinforce referee behaviors. This includes examining physical environments, performance measurement systems, staff evaluation criteria, and resource allocation patterns.

Cultural Transformation: Moving from compliance-driven to growth-oriented culture requires changing how success is defined, measured, and celebrated. Organizations must shift from asking "Did they follow the rules?" to "Are they developing the skills and relationships they need to thrive?"

Staff Development: The transformation repositions staff as coaches rather than referees or officers. This involves a shift in staff's professional identity, ultimately embracing coaching playbooks not implementing the rule book.

Staff learn to respond to setbacks with curiosity and support rather than immediate sanctions.

Performance Measurement Revolution: Traditional metrics focused on recidivism rates ignore the progress youth make in developing stability, skills, and relationships. The coaching approach helps organizations identify dual-impact metrics that measure both staff coaching effectiveness and youth development across multiple life domains.

PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION

Person-Centered Assessment: Rather than focusing solely on risk factors and deficits, coaching assessments emphasize youth's individual interests, talents, cultural background, and definitions of success. This comprehensive understanding enables personalized approaches that resonate with each young person's motivations and circumstances.

Success Planning: Coaches work collaboratively with youth to develop realistic, incremental goals that build toward their vision of thriving. These plans acknowledge that progress isn't linear and that temporary setbacks are normal parts of growth. Success plans prioritize celebrating progress while maintaining clear expectations.

Relationship-Focused Supervision: The coaching model prioritizes building authentic, supportive relationships as the foundation for all other interventions. Contact frequency and format are determined by individual need and circumstances rather than rigid policy requirements.

Community Integration: Coaches help youth develop supportive relationships and connections beyond the justice system. This includes strengthening family relationships, building peer support networks, and connecting with community resources and opportunities.

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Organizational Readiness Assessment

Successful implementation requires systematic organizational assessment across multiple domains. Agencies must evaluate their current culture, policies, physical environment, staff capabilities, and stakeholder relationships to identify transformation priorities.

Leadership Commitment: Sustainable change requires authentic commitment from organizational leadership to fundamental transformation rather than superficial modifications. Leaders must be prepared to challenge existing assumptions and practices that conflict with coaching principles.

Staff Engagement: Frontline staff must be active participants in the transformation process rather than passive recipients of new policies. Their insights into current system barriers and their vision for improved practice drive successful implementation.

Policy Alignment: Existing policies and procedures must be systematically reviewed and revised to support coaching behaviors. This includes contact standards, violation response protocols, performance evaluation criteria, and resource allocation decisions.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND MEASUREMENT

Youth Outcomes

As organizations incorporate a coaching approach, we imagine improved outcomes across multiple domains beyond traditional recidivism measures. These include:

- Increased successful completion of supervision
- Improved educational engagement and achievement
- Enhanced employment stability and career development
- Strengthened family and community relationships
- Improved mental health and substance abuse recovery
- Greater self-efficacy and future orientation

Staff Outcomes

Organizational transformation should also improve staff experience and effectiveness:

- Increased job satisfaction and sense of purpose
- Reduced turnover and burnout
- Enhanced skills in relationship building and behavior change
- Greater alignment between personal values and job requirements
- Improved collaboration and team cohesion

System Outcomes

Broader system impacts include:

- More efficient resource utilization
- Reduced costs associated with repeated placements and violations
- Improved community safety through genuine rehabilitation
- Enhanced stakeholder satisfaction and support
- Greater organizational resilience and adaptability

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Addressing Implementation Challenges

Organizations considering adopting a coaching approach must prepare for several predictable challenges. Resistance to change is natural, particularly when transformation challenges established practices and assumptions. Success requires sustained commitment, adequate resources for training and support, and patience during the transition period.

Staff may initially struggle with role changes, particularly the shift from authority-based to relationship-based interactions. Comprehensive training, ongoing supervision, and peer support networks help staff develop confidence in coaching approaches.

External stakeholders, including courts, law enforcement, and community members, may need education about the coaching model to understand how it maintains public safety while improving youth outcomes.

Policy Implications

The coaching approach has significant implications for juvenile justice policy at multiple levels. State and local policies that mandate specific violation responses or contact frequencies may need revision to allow coaching flexibility. Funding formulas that reward compliance monitoring over behavior change outcomes create barriers to transformation.

Professional education and training programs must incorporate coaching principles and organizational change concepts to prepare the next generation of juvenile justice professionals for this new paradigm.

Future Research Directions

Implementation of the coaching approach creates opportunities for research on organizational transformation in juvenile justice settings. Key research questions include optimal implementation strategies, measurement of coaching quality, and long-term outcome evaluation across diverse organizational contexts.

Comparative studies examining coaching versus traditional approaches could provide valuable evidence for policy decisions. Research on staff development and retention under coaching models could inform human resource strategies.

Conclusion

The juvenile justice system's current "referee" approach fails to achieve its fundamental mission of helping youth thrive. Despite good intentions and evidence-based program implementation, organizational structures designed around surveillance and punishment undermine rehabilitation efforts.

The coaching approach offers a comprehensive framework for organizational transformation that aligns daily operations with stated mission. By repositioning youth as players with potential and staff as coaches invested in their success, we create the conditions for genuine behavior change and positive youth development.

This transformation requires courage to challenge established practices and commitment to sustained change efforts. However, the potential impact—helping young people reach their potential while creating more satisfying work for staff—justifies the investment required.

The time has come to move beyond incremental reforms and embrace systematic transformation. Youth, families, staff, and communities deserve a juvenile justice system that actually accomplishes what it claims to do: helping young people thrive beyond their justice involvement.

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Leveraging Technology: Improving Communication and Engagement with Youth and Families

Interactive Workshop | Technology

*Sarah Tucker, Florida Network of Youth and Family Services,
SNAP Youth Justice Probation Coordinator*

*Lauren Maldonado, Florida Network of Youth and Family
Services*

ABSTRACT

Digital tools are transforming how we engage youth and families, particularly those involved in the justice system. This session explores how the SNAP® for Youth program uses interactive technology—such as digital modules, video role plays, and real-time response systems—to teach self-control, emotion regulation, and problem-solving. Facilitators guide youth through 13 digital sessions where they identify emotional triggers, challenge thinking errors, and build pro-social plans. Designed for high-risk youth, this approach enhances engagement, reduces stigma, and offers flexible delivery in both community and custody settings. Participants will gain insight into how these strategies can be adapted to improve communication, participation, and outcomes across various systems serving youth and families. Practical tools and implementation insights will be shared.

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The Work Is the Reward: Reigniting Purpose in Juvenile Justice

Interactive Workshop | Staff Training

Haley Hunt, The VERB Kind, CEO/ Founder

ABSTRACT

This session is designed to pour into the hearts of those who pour out daily. It's for the worn-down, the quietly courageous, and the mission-driven folks who need to be reminded that their presence still matters—even when the progress feels slow.

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What's Jail Got to Do With It? Using Community-based Organizations to Prevent Youth Incarceration

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

*Karen Braxton, 3rd Judicial Circuit Court of Michigan, Judge
Christopher Whittington, 3rd Judicial Circuit Court of
Michigan, JDTC Coordinator
Jauntez Bates, Project Boss Up, Founder & CEO*

ABSTRACT

The Juvenile Drug Treatment Court (JDTC) is a highly structured, specialty court that provides an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system through the use of comprehensive supervision and treatment services. Learn how the JDTC in Wayne County, Michigan utilizes community-based organizations to provide essential services, resources, and support with a focus on the program's mentoring services through Project Boss Up.

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The Power of Collaboration: Clinician/Credible Messenger Delivery of a Youth Self-Regulation Program

Interactive Workshop | Behavioral Health

Jessica Linick, The Lionheart Foundation

*Gabrielle Riggins, DC Department of Youth Rehabilitation
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*Romita Sillitti, DC Department of Youth Rehabilitation
Services, Supervisory Health Services Program Manager*

*Carroll Montgomery, Credible Messenger, Grow Up Grow Out
Jr.*

ABSTRACT

Increasingly, interventions for trauma-impacted youth engaging in high-risk behaviors are focusing on the building of youths' self-regulation skills. However, many existing interventions are not only costly, but may have lower buy-in due to limited contextual appropriateness. Power Source is a flexibly delivered social-emotional, self-regulation program for trauma-impacted youth that uses culturally relevant stories, language, and concepts to address youth criminogenic needs and risk factors, build resilience, and promote a positive self-identity. Using a combination of cognitive-behavioral approaches, mindfulness techniques, and restorative practices (Circles), PS supports youth in building self-regulation skills and applying these skills across a variety of relevant contexts (e.g., peer relationships). This presentation will highlight an innovative approach to delivery of PS that also increases buy-in: co-facilitation with a mental health clinician and credible messenger. This workshop will include an introduction to PS and its theoretical underpinnings, core self-regulation skills taught, and practical exercises that participants can bring to their agencies.

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A Better Today for a Brighter Tomorrow: Start Now!

Interactive Workshop | Family Engagement

Nakatia Clay, Motivation Speaks Transformational Speaker

ABSTRACT

Raising a child with multiple disabilities and behavioral challenges is difficult, especially when many school discipline policies disproportionately criminalize students of color and students with disabilities.

Through storytelling and real-life experiences, I'll share my journey of faith, struggle, and perseverance; and how my son escaped the school-to-prison pipeline.

INTRODUCTION

The Story Behind Motivation Speaks

Every movement begins with a story. When my son was born, complications during birth nearly cost him his life. As he grew, developmental delays became evident, he struggled to walk and talk, yet my concerns were minimized. I was handed pamphlets instead of resources, surveys instead of solutions. Eventually, he was diagnosed with hearing loss and an intellectual disability.

School became another battleground. By the age of eight, my son was still struggling to master basic literacy skills, and rather than receive targeted support, he was labeled with ADHD. Discipline was frequent, but intervention was rare. As a young Black male, he was being pushed onto a trajectory that looked less like education and more like preparation for incarceration—a pattern we now recognize as the school-to-prison pipeline.

Because of my strong faith in Jesus Christ and my prayer life, I was determined to interrupt that cycle. I made the difficult decision to leave college and my job so I could sit with him in class. I studied educational

rights, learned the language of special education, and became fluent in advocacy.

Years of prayer, persistence, and advocacy paid off. My son not only overcame the limitations others placed on him but went on to graduate high school. His success was a testament to what is possible when families are equipped with knowledge, advocacy tools, and support.

From this journey, **Motivation Speaks** was birthed. What began as one mother fighting for her son has grown into a mission to help families navigate the same systems that once left me feeling voiceless and equip professionals with tools to better engage parents as partners.

Motivation Speaks is a Christ-centered training and advocacy organization dedicated to:

- Supporting families of children with disabilities through holistic training and coaching.
- Providing professional development to educators and service providers.
- Addressing systemic barriers that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Preventing justice involvement through the school-to-prison pipeline and dismantling barriers that push youth toward the justice system is at the forefront of the organization's mission.

“A BETTER TODAY FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW” TRAINING OVERVIEW

Key Topics

- Disproportionate discipline and its role in justice involvement.
- Common advocacy challenges faced by parents.
- Strategies for engaging parents as equal partners.
- The role of professionals and organizations in advancing equitable outcomes.

Goals

- Equip professionals with strategies to engage and empower parents.
- Illustrate real barriers families face when navigating special education and discipline.

- Emphasize collaborative approaches that build trust between families and systems.

Background

Research shows that students with disabilities, behavioral challenges, and students of color are disciplined more harshly and frequently in educational settings, creating a pathway to early justice involvement. Parents are left discouraged and overwhelmed due to the criminalization of typical adolescent behavior. As a result, parents lack trust in both the processes in place to support their children and the people who implement them.

Disproportionate Discipline & Justice Pathways

Students with disabilities and students of color are more likely to face exclusionary discipline. According to key OSEP findings and guidance:

- School-aged students with disabilities made up 13.2% of total enrollment but received 20.5% of in-school suspensions and 24.5% of out-of-school suspensions.
- Black children with disabilities comprised 17.2% of this population but represented 43.5% of students suspended or expelled for more than 10 days during the 2019–20 school year.

Exclusionary Discipline as a Predictor of Justice Involvement

- The overuse and misuse of suspensions triple the likelihood of justice involvement. Youth who experience a suspension are nearly three times more likely to become justice-involved within the following year (Fabelo et al., 2011).
- Over 90% of youth in juvenile justice with special education needs experienced suspension/expulsion before system entry (Shaw & McCarthy, 2021; OJJDP literature review).
- Some studies suggest that school districts under pressure to produce impressive academic outcomes among their student populations are inclined to redirect low-achieving youths to alternative platforms, including the juvenile justice system (Osher et al., 2002).
- As a result, the juvenile justice system has been characterized as a “default system” for youths who perform poorly in school (Nelson, 2000).

Disproportionate Impact on Students of Color

- Black students with disabilities are suspended at rates more than twice their peers (OSEP, 2024 discipline guidance).
- These disparities amplify the school-to-prison pipeline, pushing students into justice involvement at disproportionate rates (Williams, 2023).

Advocacy Challenges Faced by Parents

As a result of suspensions, expulsions, and informal removals, many parents struggle with:

- Employment barriers that create financial hardship.
- Mental health impacts on families.
- Parents being forced into the role of educator.
- Criminalization of typical adolescent behavior.
- Barriers to effective advocacy.

Effects on Parent/Professional Relationships

- Decreased engagement.
- Deep mistrust of systems and professionals.

The Role of Educators, Advocates, and Organizations in Creating More Equitable Outcomes

Parents distrust the system because they feel excluded from decision-making and believe the process is often unfair. Many feel their children are targeted and that information is withheld. To build trust:

- Give parents a seat at the table; educate parents on the process.
- Involve parents in decision-making.
- Share information proactively.
- Recognize that parents, no matter their circumstances, deserve respect.
- Understand different cultural approaches to parenting.
- Be aware of community struggles—such as families affected by violence—and how they impact students.
- Elevate parent voice.
- Advocate **with** parents, not against them.

Case Scenario: Punished Rather than Protected

KT, a middle school student with autism and oppositional defiant disorder, struggled with behavior through school. By the start of 6th grade, however, his mother had secured the right diagnosis, medication, and community supports. With his IEP properly implemented, including classroom strategies and a safe space, KT made tremendous progress, going months without a single behavioral infraction.

That progress was derailed one evening at a school function. KT became overwhelmed and used his IEP self-removal strategy to leave the area where the activity was being held. Unfortunately, none of the supervising teachers knew his plan or diagnosis. Instead of giving him space, staff chased and attempted to restrain him, escalating the situation. The police were called, and his mother arrived to find her son face down on the cold concrete with a police officer's knee pressed into his back. The following day, his mother was notified that her son would be expelled for the incident.

This case illustrates how quickly a student with an IEP can be threatened with expulsion, even after significant progress.

Reflection Questions

- How does staff training and awareness of IEPs impact student safety and outcomes?
- How can schools avoid allowing past behaviors to overshadow current progress?
- What financial and emotional hardships might families face when incidents lead to exclusionary discipline?

CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

The case scenario presented in this workshop illustrates the significant challenges families face when navigating educational systems that often prioritize discipline over support, particularly for students with disabilities and behavioral challenges.

In the KT scenario, despite months of progress and appropriate implementation of his IEP, the student's behavioral incident was escalated due to staff unawareness and inadequate training. The principal's decision to focus on past behavior rather than recent progress further demonstrates how bias and systemic practices can perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline.

IMPLICATIONS FOR JUVENILE SERVICES PRACTICE

These findings have several key implications for professionals working with youth at risk of justice involvement:

1. **Support Families in Advocacy:** Juvenile service providers can collaborate with organizations like Motivation Speaks to equip parents and professionals with tools, knowledge, and strategies to advocate effectively. This proactive approach reduces the likelihood of disputes escalating to legal action or exclusionary discipline.
2. **Prioritize Family Engagement:** Professionals must actively include parents as partners in educational planning and disciplinary processes, ensuring their voices are heard and respected. Excluding families not only undermines advocacy but may inadvertently increase the risk of negative outcomes for youth.
3. **Staff Training and Awareness:** Schools and juvenile service programs should provide comprehensive training for educators and staff on IEP implementation, disability awareness, and trauma-informed practices. Understanding the unique needs of each student prevents unnecessary escalation of behavioral incidents.
4. **Address Systemic Bias:** Professionals should recognize and confront implicit bias that may influence disciplinary decisions, particularly for students of color and those with behavioral or developmental disabilities. Policies and practices should reflect equity and fairness, not punitive assumptions based on past behavior or stereotypes.

WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

MS training participants rate MS workshops as highly informative and empowering:

- “Audience engagement was wonderful.” (Anonymous)
- “Connected on a spiritual and emotional level, so insightful.” (Anonymous)
- “Another amazing breakout session, a woman full of love.” (Anonymous)

CALL TO ACTION FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Partner with Motivation Speaks to support at-risk youth and their families with educational advocacy.

- Schedule professional development for staff.

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CORRESPONDENCE

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Leveraging Technology to Drive Motivation and Outcomes

Interactive Workshop | Technology

Adam Henderson, Orijin, PBC

ABSTRACT

Learn how jurisdictions use education technology to drive motivation among juveniles. Once motivated, learn how to sustain motivation to drive skill development and learning outcomes using incentivization technology. Then, track sustained engagement, skills gains, program outcomes to show achieved successes.

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Helping Youth Find the ‘Next Step’ Without College

Interactive Workshop | Technology

Daniel Clark, Blueprint30, CEO

ABSTRACT

Blueprint30 is a workforce development software company dedicated to helping nonprofits and agencies create career pathways for at-risk youth. Blueprint30 provides a turnkey workforce development program for agencies

This workshop will share best practices for building, launching, and scaling the workforce development portion of your agency. This session will provide actionable strategies on curriculum development, strategic partnerships, funding models, and technology integration to create sustainable workforce programs. Participants will gain insights on how to leverage data-driven decision-making and AI-driven solutions to expand their impact.

Youth in the United States face significant challenges when it comes to preparing for life after high school, especially those impacted by the juvenile justice system. Each year, more than 700,000 youth are released from juvenile detention facilities, and nearly 70 percent are re-arrested within three years (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2020). At the same time, over 4.5 million young people ages 16 to 24 are considered disconnected, meaning they are neither in school nor employed (Measure of America, 2023). College enrollment rates have also declined steadily, with just 62 percent of recent high school graduates enrolling immediately in college compared to 70 percent two decades ago (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). This means that nearly four in ten students finishing high school today are not pursuing higher education and often lack a clear plan for the next step. While higher education remains a pathway for some, a growing number of young people across both justice involved and traditional high school settings lack access, interest, or

resources to pursue a four year degree. This gap in opportunity contributes to cycles of unemployment, instability, and in many cases, re offending. For justice involved youth, the consequences are even more severe, as the lack of a clear pathway forward can lead to repeat offenses and further entanglement with the system.

Disconnected youth, defined as individuals ages 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor employed, number over 4.5 million in the United States (Measure of America, 2023). Research shows that disconnected youth are at greater risk of poverty, incarceration, and long term underemployment (Lewis and Gladden, 2019). Recidivism also remains a persistent concern. Nearly 70 percent of youth released from juvenile facilities are re arrested within three years (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2020). At the same time, college enrollment among recent high school graduates continues to decline, with many students citing cost, lack of interest, and a desire to begin working immediately as reasons for bypassing higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Together, these factors point to the urgent need for accessible and meaningful alternatives.

One promising approach involves connecting youth to real world opportunities and mentors who demonstrate that success is possible outside of traditional higher education. When young people meet individuals who have “made it out” of difficult circumstances through military service, first responder careers, or skilled trades, they see firsthand that non college pathways can lead to stability and purpose. These stories of lived experience often resonate more strongly than abstract career descriptions, as they provide authentic examples of possibility.

Effective strategies also combine in person engagement with online tools. In person sessions are vital for relationship building, trust, and direct conversation. Youth benefit from hearing stories, asking questions, and interacting with role models in real time. Online platforms extend that connection, offering ongoing opportunities for students to explore resources, revisit career options, and maintain communication at their own pace. Together, these formats create a flexible system that meets youth where they are.

Career exploration plays a central role in this process. Activities such as short quizzes, interest inventories, and guided discussions give students the chance to discover not only what they want to do, but also what they do not

want to do. This trial and error approach prevents young people from being pushed into careers that do not align with their strengths or interests, and instead equips them to make more confident, informed decisions about their future.

Exposure to practical opportunities strengthens this process even further. Allowing students to interact with recruiters, visit academies, attend demonstrations, or experience job shadowing builds confidence and reduces fear of the unknown. A young person who visits a fire academy, meets trade school instructors, or hears from military recruiters leaves with a clearer understanding of what pursuing that path would look like in reality. This turns career aspirations into tangible possibilities rather than distant ideas.

The results of these strategies have been promising. More than 80 percent of participating youth engaged directly with recruiters or mentors. Ninety percent completed programming with a clear pathway in mind, whether in trades, public service, or the military. Students reported greater confidence in their decision making and reduced anxiety about what comes next after high school. For justice involved youth, career focused engagement has also been associated with stronger future oriented goals, a protective factor against recidivism.

The implications are significant for schools, nonprofit organizations, and juvenile detention centers. By validating non college careers as meaningful and sustainable, these strategies help break the cycles of uncertainty and instability that so often keep young people from thriving. They also provide justice involved youth with a tangible reason to believe in their future, equipping them with direction at the very moment they are most vulnerable to returning to negative patterns. Perhaps most importantly, the approach builds trust. When youth see role models who reflect their experiences and demonstrate achievable success, they begin to believe the same outcomes are possible for themselves.

This work would not be possible without the dedication of school counselors, nonprofit staff, and recruiters who invest in the lives of young people every day. Their willingness to share time, resources, and belief in the potential of each student ensures that opportunities extend far beyond a classroom or a program.

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Empowering Youth Voices: Holding a Community Circle for Healing and Growth in Juvenile Justice

Interactive Workshop | Leadership

Licia Lentz, Allegheny Intermediate Unit

ABSTRACT

In this interactive session, participants will experience the transformative power of a community circle, a restorative justice practice that fosters open dialogue, trust, and healing. Attendees will gain hands-on experience facilitating and participating in a circle designed to encourage youth in the juvenile justice system to share their stories, express their emotions, and build community connections. The session will highlight the importance of inclusivity, active listening, and shared responsibility in promoting accountability and personal growth among youth. This approach not only supports rehabilitation but also strengthens community bonds and reduces recidivism.

Participants will leave with practical tools to incorporate community circles into their work, creating spaces for healing, empowerment, and positive change.

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Beyond Assumptions: Using Data to Improve Behavior Management

Interactive Workshop | Secure Care

*Markeida Singleton, Student & Teacher Empowerment Group,
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ABSTRACT

Are your behavior management systems truly effective? Are staff confident in responding to challenging youth? Are data driving your interventions or are assumptions leading the way? This training examines the barriers that hinder sustainable behavior management systems in juvenile justice settings. We will also discuss how confronting these challenges can lead to reduced use of force and isolation, higher staff retention, and safer environments. Participants will explore how to use data to improve relationships between youth and staff, competency in implementing programming, and consistency across settings. This session emphasizes the power of analyzing existing systems to enhance behavior programming facility-wide.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional approach to managing behavior in juvenile facilities is ineffective. The juvenile justice system is in a documented crisis, with facilities struggling to provide youth with even basic supervision and services (CSGJC et al., 2023). This crisis is partly a result of a historical reliance on coercive and punitive tactics, such as solitary confinement, a practice actively opposed by the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP, 2025). The reliance on control-based methods leads to high staff turnover, which in turn compromises staff effectiveness and raises costs for facilities (Mack & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2021). Since “treatment as usual” frequently fails to manage challenging behavior, more effective interventions are necessary (Bush et al., 2023).

Many juvenile facilities operate on assumptions where punishment has replaced understanding and skill-building. While safety and security are paramount, the author’s previous observations in juvenile correctional facilities revealed that staff often respond to problem behaviors based on

assumptions about a youth's intentions. Understanding how these assumptions influence staff responses is critical for developing more data-driven strategies that promote positive behavioral outcomes and equitable treatment. Although initial studies on behavior modification showed some positive results, their conclusions were often limited by methodological weaknesses (Davidson & Seidman, 1974). This article demonstrates how specialized training can help staff manage behavior by creating a more data-driven system that is not dependent on coercive methods. Behavior management is the ongoing effort by facility staff to implement strategies that elicit positive behavior from resident youth (Deitch, 2020), offering a path toward a more effective system.

Understanding Coercion

Punishing behavior through verbal reprimands, isolation, or threats is a form of coercion. Coercion is defined by Sidman (1993) as the control of behavior through punishment or the threat of punishment. It presents a spectrum of tactics that fail to address the function of the behavior. Though it may appear effective in the short term, coercion can create undesirable side effects. Verbal coercion includes subtle and overt behaviors that aim to control a youth. This can be in the form of interrogating youth about their behavior, engaging in power struggles, shame or criticism to put a youth down. It can also include employing silence to ignore a youth's attempts to communicate. These verbal tactics can escalate into a form of psychological manipulation that aims to damage a youth's self-worth by invalidating their feelings or opinions. The most severe forms of coercion, however, are physical. These include the use of physical restraint and punishment-based removals that isolate a youth as a consequence. This type of control often results in youth receiving a lot of attention for ineffective behavior.

A growing body of research supports a shift from control-based strategies to a more data-driven approach in juvenile facilities. Data-driven behavior management systems provide clear expectations for both youth and staff. These systems can also include appropriate consequences for negative behaviors. The objective of these consequences should not be punishment, but rather changing the youth's behavior in the future (Deitch, 2020). Organizations like the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI, 2014) have policies against punitive measures. For instance, JDAI prohibits the use of room confinement for discipline. Studies have also shown that high-quality treatment within a residential program decreases the likelihood of subsequent arrest for youth who have completed the program (Baglivio et al., 2019). This evidence strongly supports a move towards data-driven interventions to improve behavioral outcomes.

Methods

Building on the research that supports a data-driven approach, this article promotes a framework rooted in the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). The transition to this framework requires a fundamental shift in how behavior is understood and managed. This science-based approach shows how our environment can influence our behavior. As a critical first step, this framework requires equipping staff with the skills necessary to implement this approach.

A preferred component within this framework is Behavioral Skills Training (BST). Unlike methods that use control to influence change, BST provides a systematic, skill-building alternative to teach both staff and youth a new way to interact. Based on research, BST utilizes four core components to teach new skills: instructions, modeling, rehearsal, and feedback (Lafasakis & Sturmey, 2007). Instructions are used to tell a person how to perform a new skill. Modeling is used to demonstrate the skill so that the learner can see exactly how it should be done. After modeling, the learner is given an opportunity to practice the skill through rehearsal. Finally, feedback is given to affirm correct performance and to offer guidance for improvement.

One notable application of BST involved a pyramidal training model that taught supervisors to train floor staff in delivering behavior-specific praise (Hay, 2020). The results indicated that this model was successful in improving procedural fidelity and decreasing negative interactions between staff and youth. The application of BST in this manner can help to cultivate positive relationships between staff and youth, further reducing the reliance on coercive practices in programming (Luna et al., 2022). A diverse interdisciplinary team, composed of staff and behavior specialists, is necessary for the successful implementation of this new framework.

Organizational Accountability

Moving a facility from a control-based model to one of continuous improvement requires a fundamental shift in its culture. This is the essence of organizational accountability. The data-driven framework outlined below serves as the roadmap for this transformation, ensuring that every step is a deliberate action that prioritizes effective, ethical, and evidence-based practices for staff and youth.

Data Collection

The foundation of an accountable organization is the use of objective data, which requires moving beyond subjective impressions to direct observation. This process is upheld by clear policies and procedures for what and how to

measure behavior. This involves measuring the antecedents (what happens before the behavior), the behavior itself, and the consequences (what happens after the behavior). For staff, this systematic approach demonstrates accountability by replacing assumptions with evidence-based strategies. For youth, it ensures interventions are based on a clear understanding of their behavioral needs, not on control-based responses. Without this data, staff may misinterpret a youth's behavior. By collecting objective data in real-time, staff can provide behavior specialists with the information needed to accurately identify the behavior's function.

Analysis

Once data is collected, it is analyzed to determine the function of the behavior. All behavior, whether appropriate or inappropriate, serves a purpose: either to obtain something (e.g., attention, a tangible item, or sensory stimulation) or to escape something (e.g., a demand or an aversive situation). Organizations can use their analysis to design a function-based intervention that addresses the underlying reason for the behavior. The entire process of analysis and design must be governed by a policy and procedure that ensures a consistent, methodical, and evidence-based approach. It is a direct measure of its ethical obligation to prioritize the health and development of the youth in its care.

'Implementation

The implementation of any new framework demands accountability from both the organization and its staff. This process relies heavily on having clear policies and procedures in place. For a facility to uphold its commitment to change, it must have formal policies that define the training, supervision, and ongoing support needed for staff to implement interventions with fidelity. When an organization provides this level of support, it holds itself accountable for the success of its staff. Similarly, staff members demonstrate their accountability by consistently and accurately applying the strategies they were taught. This focus on the consistent and precise application of interventions directly impacts the effectiveness of the treatment and ultimately, the outcomes for the youth.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The final and most critical step in organizational accountability is the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the intervention. This involves collecting the same data and comparing it to the baseline data to determine if the intervention is effective. The decision to maintain, modify, or fade an intervention is governed by a formal policy that dictates objective, data-driven criteria. If the data shows progress, the intervention is maintained and

potentially faded. If the data shows no progress or a worsening of the behavior, the team must re-evaluate their analysis and intervention plan. This feedback loop is the ultimate demonstration of accountability to all stakeholders. An accountable organization does not just implement a program. It verifies its effectiveness and is willing to change course when the data shows that its methods are not working.

Sustainability

Implementation of a data-driven framework for behavior management can create lasting and meaningful change. For this to happen, interventions must be designed with generalization in mind. Generalization is the process by which a youth uses a new skill they've been taught in a new environment, with different people, or in new situations. For example, a youth who learns to use a calm-down strategy with one staff member could also use it with other staff members.

Beyond teaching replacement behaviors, staff must also support the maintenance of the new skills.

Maintenance is the continued use of a skill over time, even after the intervention has been completed. For effective programming, facilities should focus on teaching pivotal behaviors. These are skills that, when learned, lead to widespread and generalized changes in other unlearned behaviors. Mastering a pivotal behavior can create a behavioral cusp, which is a behavior change that exposes a youth to new environments, contingencies, and opportunities for further growth (Rosales-Ruiz & Baer, 1997). The continued use and development of both pivotal behaviors and behavioral cusps requires collaborative and consistent reinforcement. Collaboration within facilities helps to maintain the use of these new skills across staff and settings.

Limitations

The implementation of a data-driven framework in juvenile facilities is often impacted by two primary barriers: systemic issues and staff resistance to change. For example, a 2023 national survey found that since the COVID-19 pandemic, juvenile corrections and probation agencies have faced "unprecedented levels" of challenges in recruiting and retaining frontline staff (Systems in Crisis, 2023). A consequence of this systemic instability is costly staff turnover, which can render the organization unstable and less effective in accomplishing aims (Matz et al., 2012, as cited in Lambert, 2001; Lambert & Hogan, 2009). This instability is compounded by a lack of attention to job stress among staff working in juvenile facilities (Wells et al., 2009). This is a factor that can fuel the very resistance to change that

organizations are struggling with. As Cox (2013) notes, “People don’t resist change as much as they resist being changed.” To address these limitations, staff training must be enhanced to include strategies for integrating prosocial skills into daily activities. Providing staff with specific, skill-focused training is the most direct way to dismantle existing barriers and create an environment where data-driven interventions can prompt positive change.

CONCLUSION

The future of juvenile justice lies in a transition from a control-based system to one guided by data. A data-driven framework offers a clear path to meaningful reform. The path to change requires moving beyond assumptions and embracing the collaborative work of diverse, interdisciplinary teams. By collecting objective data, staff can understand the function of behavior and design targeted interventions that are both effective and humane. Overcoming systemic issues that hinder change is absolutely necessary. This requires empowering staff with dignity, respect, and effective tools. They will also need support with addressing job-related stress. Embracing a data-driven approach allows us to remove organizational barriers and develop a resilient workforce. We must construct a system where data replaces assumption, teaching replaces punishment, and opportunity replaces youth adversity.

Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to staff in juvenile facilities who strive for meaningful change. Their efforts highlight the importance of adequate resources and support to sustain reform. The dedication extends to the youth who did not receive the help they needed before placement. It also extends to the caregivers who work tirelessly to support young people with challenging behaviors. Most of all, this work is inspired by my sons, whose presence reminds me daily of the importance of building a better future for all youth.

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The Power of Culture: Laying the Foundation for Fair, Just, and Resilient Systems

Interactive Workshop | Leadership

Antonia Reason, Women of Reason, Inc, CEO and Founder

ABSTRACT

In every thriving organization, culture is the unseen force that shapes decisions, drives behaviors, and determines outcomes. Cultivating the right culture in juvenile services isn't just important — it's transformational.

This highly engaging and interactive workshop empowers Executive Staff, Superintendents, Directors, Middle Managers, Direct Care Staff, Support Services, School Administrators, Probation Division, and Trainers to become intentional architects of their organizational culture. We will explore how to design policies and practices that drive fairness, promote equity, and build true system readiness for change.

Participants will engage in real-world activities, reflective assessments, and collaborative strategy-building to better understand their current organizational climate, identify growth opportunities, and apply this knowledge to a strategic plan. You will leave with powerful, ready-to-use tools and practical next steps that can be immediately applied to strengthen your agency's culture and improve outcomes for youth and families.

Culture is not what you say — it's what you consistently do. This session will help you align your aspirations with what you actually become. Get ready to shape a system that's not just prepared for change — but one that leads it.

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NYC Close to Home Juvenile Education

Interactive Workshop | Education

*Dr. Timothy Lisante, NYC ACS Administration for Children
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ABSTRACT

This Session will focus on how New York City planned and implemented the "Close to Home" initiative. A goal of both the Governor and Mayor was to no longer send NYC students to upstate facilities. The NYC Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) convened bi-monthly. The Committee advised City partners on issues related to the operational phases of juvenile justice realignment and make recommendations on multi-stakeholder issues affecting the City's juvenile justice system. The Committee's recommendations influence policy makers and practitioners not only in educational matters but included systems but not limited to: the provision of mental health services, family support services, dual-jurisdiction youth and the continuum of community-based programs available to youth on Probation.

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CONNECT--A Relationship-based Model for Working with Youth

Interactive Workshop | Secure Care

Sara Simpson, Juvenile Justice and Youth Services, Clinical Training Specialist

Harry Schwenke, Juvenile Justice and Youth Services

ABSTRACT

CONNECT is a relationship-based model for staff working with youth. The acronym CONNECT stands for eight focus areas: Check in, Observe, Nonjudgmental, Needs, Empathy, Consider Communication and Take Time. CONNECT is a “way of being”, such as being empathetic, nonjudgmental, and observant. It is also a “way of doing”, such as checking in, taking time, and considering communication and needs. These “ways of being” and “ways of doing” form the basis of relationships and the overall culture we are working to create here in JJYS.

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Unlocking Practical Solutions for Lasting System Change

Interactive Workshop | Court Services

Valerie Meade, Crime and Justice Institute, Deputy Director

ABSTRACT

Have you ever wondered why most implementation strategies fail? This dynamic workshop is designed to empower participants with the tools and strategies needed to drive meaningful system change using an evidence-based implementation model. Throughout this engaging session, participants will gain insight into the purpose, goals, and actionable strategies of the four phases of system change; learning how to turn concepts into real-world impact. This workshop will explore the key factors that determine system readiness, uncovering the do's and don'ts to ensure smooth and successful implementation. Furthermore, participants will learn strategies to initiate and sustain meaningful inter- and intra-agency collaboration, creating lasting partnerships that drive success from start to finish.

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The Traps of Implicit Bias and Self-Image Threats

Interactive Workshop | Behavioral Health

Michelle Stagmer, JKM Training, Inc. - Safe Crisis Management Training, JKM Instructor

ABSTRACT

Implicit Bias can influence how we think about & interact with a person... even if we do not consciously believe the stereotype is true about all people we associate with that category. We also know that these notions can influence us to act in ways that are incongruent with our self-perception, character & values. Understanding that “Fast Traps” lead to heavy reliance on unconscious mental shortcuts, making us more vulnerable to using unwanted behavior, is one mindful way to support the individuals in our programs.

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Be a HERO! Tricks of the Trade

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Vicki Reed, Consultant/author/trainer

ABSTRACT

Nothing good ever happens to me.” “No one tells me what to do!” “What’s the use?” “I don’t care!” Ever hear this type of talk from kids? Well, we’ve got you covered! Be a HERO by using Hope, Empathy, Resilience, & Overcoming. This workshop focuses on how to use simple strategies in day-to-day interactions with youth to both prevent and intervene with problem behaviors. This workshop is not going to focus on the "why do youth act the way they do" but rather on easy, practical ways staff can help youth both in the moment and for future success. This workshop will benefit staff working directly with youth as well as supervisory staff and trainers looking for ways to enhance their behavior management/treatment planning curriculums. .

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Mission Possible: Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders

Interactive Workshop | Court Services

*Sarah Gaither, National Partnership for Juvenile Services,
Juv-CMS Data Management Services, Project Manager*

ABSTRACT

The Deinstitutionalization of status offenders was a key provision of the 1974 JJDP Act. Progress has been made but the goal of complete removal of these youth from secure custody has not been achieved. This workshop will examine what programs have been successful across the United States and what barriers still remain.

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Solutions for Youth with Problematic Sexual Behaviors (PSB)...Where We Began and Where We Are

Interactive Workshop | Behavioral Health

*John Kubis, Family Service Center or Galveston County,
Program Director*

ABSTRACT

The treatment of adolescents with sexual behavior problems has historically focused on treating the adolescent offender utilizing theory and treatment models borrowed almost exclusively from the treatment of adult sex offenders. Within the last 15 years there has been a much needed paradigm shift for clinicians, treatment providers, legislators and educators to take into account essential developmental differences as well as empirically guided clinical interventions in the treatment of youth with sexual behavior problems. This presentation will examine underlying past assumptions and then focus on current approaches in working with youth who have engaged in problematic sexual behaviors.

The problem of youth who have committed sexual offenses and/or involved in inappropriate sexual acting-out is a complex one with serious and far-reaching consequences to the victim, the offender and to all the families affected. It takes a unique client/family needs-based treatment approach to effectively address and resolve these issues. Empirically addressing inappropriate sexual behaviors, adolescent brain development and relevant research supported intervention techniques will be the focus of the presentation. Specifically, elaboration on community care and treatment team models will be emphasized.

This didactic, interactive presentation will explore the relevance of the treatment provider, juvenile probation officer, county assistant district attorney, children's advocacy center, & other mental health professionals in the treatment process. The ultimate goal of effective treatment is to affect positive, lasting change for the victim, offender, caregiver and the community. Audience participation will be encouraged and video clips will be shown to illuminate concepts addressed in the presentation.

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Introducing the Reentry Roadmap: Putting Resources Directly into the Hands of Young People

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Kim Lovett, Center for Improving Youth Justice, Executive Director

Brendan Donahue, Center for Improving Youth Justice, Data and Technology Director

ABSTRACT

Let's put reentry resources directly into the hands of young people returning to the community. Empower them to chart their next steps to successful reentry. The Center for Improving Youth Justice (CIYJ), with support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), has completed the first version of the Reentry Roadmap mobile application to put reentry resources, tools and services directly into the hands of young people. While designed for young people, it can be used by adults to locate reentry programs and services, e.g. housing, employment, school, day care, transportation. The app is set up as a checklist of categories based on CIYJ's reentry standards research and field work by participants in CIYJ's reentry/community supervision program. Users can check off tasks completed, e.g. secured housing, and receive awards through gamification. See for yourself -All you need to do is bring a phone.

The Reentry Roadmap app puts justice-involved young people in charge of their own reentry journey. Learn how the app empowers them to chart their futures and take the next steps. Built by the nonprofit Center for Improving Youth Justice (CIYJ) with support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice, the app provides a checklist of areas key to reentry, e.g. housing, employment, education and transportation and guides young people to set goals, connect to resources, track progress and celebrate milestones. In addition to addressing current needs, the app fosters independence, confidence and life skills and is designed as a resource to continue reentry support when their system involvement has ended.

Every young person leaving a juvenile facility deserves a clear path to success—and every professional supporting them needs practical tools to help guide the journey. Designed with lived experience advisors and based on CIYJ’s reentry research, projects and standards over the past 30 years, the app offers a streamlined way to link young people to services, strengthen case planning and focus on outcomes that matter.

The session will be an interactive journey through the steps that young people take as they transition from secure placement and return to their communities. After a brief introduction to the development of the app, we will explore the actionable steps young people will take to ensure their transition is successful and what resources would help them along the way. The resources included in the initial release of the app, which is currently out for beta testing, centered around those that are nationally available. We will discuss getting more local resources into the app for future releases. CIYJ is looking for partners to introduce the app to young people leaving secure facilities or existing community supervision and for feedback on how the app can inspire young people to build strong foundations for their futures. The session will provide information for connecting young people to the app and discussion about how it can best engage young people.

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Trauma and Frozen Development: Thawing Pathways in the Brain

Interactive Workshop | Behavioral Health

Heather Olson, Beyond Risk Youth, LLC, Owner & NPJS

ABSTRACT

In 2008, Snyder & Sickmund noted, "...98.5 percent of urban adolescents were at risk for experiencing exposure to trauma compared to 83.4 percent of their suburban peers and 65.9 percent of rural teenagers." It is believed these percentages are increasing as years pass. The Adverse Childhood Experience Study conducted by Kaiser Permanente from 1995 to 1997 offered evidence that trauma which is experienced in childhood can have an impact not only on physical health but emotional well-being and risks for victimization and perpetration (<http://www.cdc.gov/ace/>). It has become crucial for professionals working with children and adolescents to increase their awareness and understanding of trauma and its impact.

It is important not only to define and recognize trauma, but to understand the physical impact of trauma on the functioning of the brain and the subsequent impact of it on behavioral and emotional manifestations. As professionals increase their awareness of these manifestations, they can help others move to post-traumatic growth and resiliency and improve future outcomes. "Resiliency is the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of significant change, adversity, or risk. The capacity changes over time and is enhanced by protective factors in the individual and environment" (Stewart et al., 1991 as cited by Greene and Conrad, 2002). The capacity for resiliency and post-traumatic growth increase with early and effective intervention.

This workshop introduces the concept of "frozen development" found within some who have experienced trauma. Insights into the physical impact of trauma on the functioning of the brain and the subsequent impact of it on behavioral and emotional manifestations will be discussed. A special emphasis will be placed on the impact of trauma found within youth involved in the justice system. Ideas and suggestions which have demonstrated success in working with populations impacted by trauma will be presented. Time will be allowed for questions and answers.

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Bridging the Gap: How Alabama Youth Services Provides Online Job Training Programs in the Classroom and Job Placement Outside the Fences

Interactive Workshop | Education

Shashauna Bloomfield, PhD, Alabama Department of Youth Services, Teacher

Tracy Smitherman, AL. Department of Youth Services School District, Superintendent

Muriel Leewright, iCEV, Corrections Territory Manager

Landee Thorn, iCEV, Correctional Education Account Executive

ABSTRACT

The workforce is facing a significant shortage of individuals with essential soft skills needed for high-demand, high-wage careers in varying technical fields, especially among those with a history of incarceration. Many applicants lack the basic skills required for successful employment, such as effective communication, resume writing, and interview techniques. Employers often hire workers who are missing these skills, leading to difficulties with communication and collaboration. To address this gap, it is proposed that job training programs be enhanced by incorporating courses focused on developing these critical soft skills within their curriculum.

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Building Bridges with Celebrity Collaborations to Enhance Private Public Partnerships: Will Smith, The Bacon Brothers and Meek Mill

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Stacy Huston, SixDegrees.org, Executive Director

Michael Scott, Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center, Executive Director

ABSTRACT

Juvenile justice facilities across the country face significant challenges in providing environments that foster connection, growth, and rehabilitation for young people. Public-private partnerships can be a powerful solution, bridging the gap between government agencies, nonprofits, and community leaders to create transformative opportunities for youth.

This session will take a deep dive into Ruth's Room, a pioneering initiative led by SixDegrees.org in partnership with the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJS).

Ruth's Room is a model for repurposing underutilized spaces into vibrant hubs of creativity, healing, and learning, giving youth an outlet for self-expression through music and the arts. Music, in particular, serves as a powerful tool for young people to share their emotions, process their experiences, and reveal what's on their minds in ways traditional forums may not allow.

This case study will explore the collaborative process behind launching Ruth's Room, the role of government partnerships, and the impact of engaging influencers, local businesses, and nonprofit organizations to create meaningful change.

This session will be interactive, encouraging participants to brainstorm ideas for their own facilities and discuss potential collaborations that can lead to real, sustainable change in the lives of justice-involved youth. Attendees will leave with actionable insights and a roadmap for developing similar initiatives in their own regions.

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The Compassionate Organization: Embedding Trauma Awareness in Leadership

Interactive Workshop | Leadership

Dipesh Chauhan, National Partnership for Juvenile Service

Greg Sumpter, Grayson County Juvenile Services, Director

ABSTRACT

Nonprofit boards, public leadership teams, and senior managers do more than govern, they shape programming, approve policies, lead fundraising efforts, and often serve as the public face of the organization. In fields like juvenile justice and social services, boards may include professionals with trauma expertise, but consistent, uniform training for board members is rare. What does it mean for a board to be trauma-informed? What guidelines should they follow? And how can this approach improve outcomes across an agency?

Boards are made up of individuals from diverse backgrounds and skill sets, and creating a shared understanding of trauma-informed principles is essential to ensuring alignment, empathy, and effective leadership. This interactive session explores the value of trauma-informed boards, offering practical tools, discussion prompts, and tips to guide board development and training. Participants will walk away with a deeper understanding of how to foster trauma-responsive environments at the highest levels of their organization and ultimately driving more thoughtful, inclusive, and impactful decision-making.

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Transformative Relational Leadership

Interactive Workshop | Leadership

*Andre' Barnes SR, Interpersonal CORE Consulting (ICC),
Youth Service Professional*

ABSTRACT

The restoration of Relational Leadership which practices the 5 Cs of Leadership (Courage, Candor, Caring, Commitment, and Competence), while bridging the gap between Generations (Veterans, Boomers, Millennials, Gen X, and Gen Z). This workshop will present lively engagement in current measures in recruiting, training, and retaining quality professionals in Youth Services Professions. There's an absence in qualitative leadership which moves from the theory of leadership to the practicality of leadership. Moving the Youth Service Provider from the Art of Leadership to the Heart of Leadership. This workshop is designed to restore strength and to renew hope in the Youth Service Provider who may be experiencing burnout, frustration, and measures of despair. Transformative Relational Leadership requires better stewardship of the People, Resources, and the Time granted us in honor of our being able to serve others while being fulfilled within ourselves. Merging the understanding Programs, Mental Health, Security, and Relational Leadership focusing on providing a Holistic Programmatical Services. This workshop is Rated R: Real, Relevant, Renewing, Refocusing, and Restorative.

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Building Rapport with Youth that are Detained and/or in Community Based Centers

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Carl Hayes, Cook County Juvenile Detention Center, Rapid Response Specialist

ABSTRACT

Juveniles in detention and community centers often feel marginalized. Staff rapport building with those juveniles are mutual interactions, essential in creating an increase in voluntary compliance and simultaneously decreasing physical restraints. When considering rapport building, some non-exhaustive key components are active listening, patience, and empathy. Staff must be genuine and consistent during their encounter with the juvenile in order to make and keep the connection. Staff should start small and realize it cannot be rushed or forced. Rapport starts with a surface-level connection through shared interests, from which a deeper connection can be obtained. Both detained juveniles as well as those in community programs often have a lack of trust of their environment. This makes it even more important to touch on their interests, such as music, sports, or schoolwork. It is equally important for staff to consider trauma exposure the juvenile may have. Staff must set expectations and boundaries early while being appropriately honest and transparent.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Promoting a Rehabilitative Environment Through Evidence-Based, Data Driven Staff Training

Interactive Workshop | Staff Training

Dr. Dan Sheridan, Alabama Department of Youth Services & Auburn University, Co-director of Behavior Analytic Services
Ashley Anderson, Alabama Department of Youth Services & Auburn University, Co-director of Behavior Analytic Services

ABSTRACT

Staff in juvenile residential treatment facilities (JRTF) are pivotal in the provision of a rehabilitative environment. Therefore, creating, delivering, and modifying staff trainings based on evidence-based approaches (i.e., methods that are scientifically proven to be effective through rigorous research) and incorporating data-driven strategies, where ongoing performance metrics and outcomes are used to continuously inform and adjust training practices, is critical in fostering a therapeutic environment. To accomplish this, an important endeavor for licensed behavior analysts within JRTFs is the integration and promotion of positive practices, clinical experience, and evidence-based research.

This workshop aims to provide an overview of some of the assessment and intervention strategies utilized by two Board Certified and Licensed Behavior Analysts and their team to implement evidenced-based, data driven decision making within a JRTF.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Dinner Plate or Meat Platter: What to Do When Your Tasks Outnumber Your Capacity to Get Things Done

Interactive Workshop | Leadership

Carol Cramer Brooks, National Partnership for Juvenile Services

ABSTRACT

Have you ever started your day with a solid plan, only to derail it within the first few minutes? This often describes a typical day in a juvenile facility. Or do you feel like you have a platter overflowing with tasks instead of the proverbial plate? As agencies struggle to fill vacant positions, many staff members are asked or expected to take on more responsibilities. Consequently, they often feel stressed, overwhelmed, unproductive, and sometimes even paralyzed to accomplish anything.

It doesn't seem likely that these two scenarios will change anytime soon. Participants attending this workshop will learn about two key models or strategies for functioning effectively in these situations: the network talent model and the Eisenhower Principle. By applying these principles and enhancing your focus on time management, you will be able to boost your productivity and reduce stress.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Building a Continuum of Care for Youth Success: A Holistic Approach to Preventing Juvenile Justice Involvement

Interactive Workshop | Community-Based

Jennie Cole-Mossman, JBS International, Technical Expert Lead

Romero Davis, Social Current, Director, Child and Family Well Being

ABSTRACT

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has released three opportunities for Building a Continuum of Care to Support Youth Success. This planning funding includes a fiscal realignment of programming to focus on prevention. JBS and our partners have focused on delivering technical assistance to these grantees that has a holistic, family centered, culturally relevant, and trauma informed lens. In doing so, we have worked with planning committees around issues related to social determinants of health and other impediments to youth well-being. We are seeking to help youth thrive in the community and in parallel process the community will thrive.

This session will provide an introduction to the Continuum of Care framework. We will discuss the successes and challenges faced by grantees thus far in the planning processes. Much of the work being done requires creating and navigating partnerships and collaborations while including youth and family voice. This session will discuss strategies used to engage the necessary representation and participation occurs to plan a continuum that serves all youth and helps the community thrive.

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Increasing Educational Outcomes Through Engagement

Interactive Workshop | Education

Helen Avis, Methodist Home for Children, Administrator of Education and Research

ABSTRACT

This interactive workshop explores the many layers of student engagement, with a focused lens on justice-involved youth. Participants will examine how engagement strategies must be adapted to meet the unique needs and lived experiences of these students, which differ significantly from those in traditional public school settings. The session will also highlight the critical role that strong, supportive relationships among teachers, staff, and administration play in creating environments where justice-involved students can thrive. Through discussion, practical examples, and resource sharing, attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of effective engagement practices and a set of tools to boost student motivation and connection in their own educational settings.

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Poster Sessions

Effective Feedback Strategies to Increase Assessment Engagement and Motivation for Struggling Readers in Juvenile Justice Facilities

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

David Houchins, Georgia State University, Distinguished Professor of Special Education

ABSTRACT

Understanding the literacy skills of adjudicated youth is imperative for successful interventions; however, these students often lack motivation to perform well on assessments due to their prior educational experiences. This study investigated the effects of a feedback-based intervention implemented to improve engagement and motivation on classroom literacy assessments. This study was part of a larger study investigating the literacy acquisition of students in juvenile justice facilities (JJs). Because the team encountered the issue of high test score variability across many participants, an exploratory feedback intervention was implemented. Findings from this pilot study will be presented. Participants will learn about barriers to student engagement and motivation on the assessments, as well as meaningful feedback strategies that can help motivate them. Discussion will follow on how teachers can provide effective feedback in their own classrooms based on the barriers to engagement of their students.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Strengthening the Writing Skills of Adolescent Females in Secure Juvenile Facilities: “Writing” Their Pathways to Success Using Intensified Self-Regulated Strategy Development Approaches

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

*Sara Sanders, University of Alabama, Research Assistant Professor
Kristine Jolivet, University of Alabama, Paul W. and Mary
Harmon Bryant Endowed Professor
Allyson Pitzel, University of Alabama, Research Assistant Professor*

ABSTRACT

Writing is a complex skill and an understood educational protective factor required for lifelong success both within and outside of educational contexts; however, it is a documented skill and mode of expression many justice-involved adolescent females struggle with. Using a scaffolded and mastery-based approach to writing instruction – self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) – these adolescents were taught the POW+TREE mnemonic to plan, organize, and write persuasive essays while including a topic sentence, reasons, explanations, and an ending to convey their ideas. In addition to POW+TREE, they were also taught a self-determination acrostic to use as they wrote persuasive essays. Complementary intensifications to SRSD with self-determination were introduced for some of the adolescents including goal-setting, another pivotal and generalizable self-determination skill necessary for education and post-school success. In this session, several examples will be shared that include significant effect sizes of youth writing growth per quality of essay elements and maintenance of writing gains across time, with attention to instructional practices, youth writing probes, and samples. Lessons learned are also discussed related to the intensifications to and focus on persuasive essays through the lens of contextual variables influencing instruction and writing growth, as well as youth improvement related to writing motivation and self-efficacy.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Implementing Reentry Programming and Planning for Youth in Juvenile Justice Facilities

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

Kristine Jolivet, University of Alabama, Paul W. and Mary Harmon Bryant Endowed Professor

Allyson Pitzel, University of Alabama, Research Assistant Professor

Sara Sanders, University of Alabama, Research Assistant Professor

ABSTRACT

The U.S. Department of Education and Justice (2014) released five guiding principles for providing higher-quality education to youth in juvenile justice facilities. Emphasized within the principles are providing youth with reentry programming and preparing youth for career-readiness. Such preparation requires facilities to adjust their focus to treatment and programming using evidence-based practices that are youth-centered and promote reentry-readiness for all youth. In this session, we will discuss the implementation of a reentry curriculum (i.e., integrated career-readiness and exploration, independent living, self-determination skills, community integration) and youth-centered transition planning at an all-female juvenile justice facility. How youth view access to reentry programming and planning as well as the impact they believe it may have on their futures will be highlighted. Attendees will learn about the importance of providing reentry instruction and supports with implement ideas for comprehensive reentry programming and planning.

CORRESPONDENCE

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Lessons Learned from a Multi-Year Journey to Improve Juvenile Facilities Climates and Youth Engagement/Behavior: From Voice to Supports

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

Kristine Jolivet, University of Alabama, Paul W. and Mary Harmon Bryant Endowed Professor

Sara Sanders, University of Alabama, Research Assistant Professor

Allyson Pitzel, University of Alabama, Research Assistant Professor

ABSTRACT

A safe, preventative, and supportive juvenile justice facility climate is a means to maximize positive youth outcomes both while incarcerated and post-release. We highlight lessons learned from a three-year partnership focused on strengthening the climate of juvenile justice facilities for maximal positive youth engagement, behavior, and outcomes paired with overall facility safety. With data from juvenile facilities, facility staff, and youth themselves, we share lessons learned from different lens: (a) measurement – how the provision of youth and staff voice in bi-annual facility climate surveys helped to craft facility climate action plans; (b) staff supports – how targeted trainings for all staff focused on addressing noncompliance and aggression, function-based logic for tool selection, adolescent development, and trauma-informed approaches improved prevention of and response to youth unsafe behaviors contributing to a more positive facility climate; (c) instructional materials – how universally implemented behavior conversations with all youth shaped more prosocial pathways; and (d) iterative and reflexivity – how we purposefully used both to guide adaptations and intensifications to amplify youth and facility staff voice to facilitate their buy-in and to support their facility climate strengthening efforts.

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Justice-Involved Youths' Perspectives on Educational Interventions to Enhance Their Future Prospects

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

Dr. Dan Sheridan, Alabama Department of Youth Services & Auburn University, Co-director of Behavior Analytic Services

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report was to explore the educational interests of justice-involved youth within a secure residential facility. Utilizing a two-step approach involving an open-ended survey and a focus group, this study gathered feedback directly from youth (N = 100) to identify preferred voluntary educational classes offered by the behavior analytic team. The open-ended survey revealed a strong interest in practical skills, such as financial and mental health literacy, and trade skills. The focus group (N = 76) on anger management revealed an interest in learning how to think more rationally and acquire coping skills to deal with difficult situations. These outcomes highlight (a) a method that includes youth in the creation and design of voluntary educational programming, (b) that youth understand that they need, and are interested, in self-improvement, and (c) potentially important system-wide implications for improving rehabilitative outcomes in juvenile justice settings.

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Future Ready: Teaching Justice-Involved Adolescents Interview Skills

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

Ashley Anderson, Alabama Department of Youth Services & Auburn University, Co-director of Behavior Analytic Services

ABSTRACT

Justice-involved youth may lack the foundational interview skills needed to secure meaningful employment. Edgemon et al. (2020) used behavioral skills training to improve interview skills for seven justice-involved adolescents. The current study extended Edgemon et al. by evaluating the extent to which a group-based intervention improved interview skills for 47 justice-involved youth. The intervention consisted of five modules: future goals, interest in the job, contributions and experience, problem-solving, and working with others. Results showed that adolescents' responses to targeted interview questions significantly improved along with increases in their correct posture and smiling and decreases in their fidgeting from pre- to post assessment. Implications and future directions for research are discussed.

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Not All Hero's Wear Capes: Navigating Detention from the Perspective of a Direct Care Staff

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

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Kristen Sellers, Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, Youth Development Specialist

Alexandria Flores, Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center

Keywords: Juvenile detention, direct care staff, leadership development, youth rehabilitation, communication, professional growth

ABSTRACT

During this poster session, the participants will be able to define what a direct care staff is, and better understand the multiple, yet important roles of a direct care staff in juvenile detention. Direct care staff are the front line staff that ensures the safety and security of all juveniles in the facility. By working together, adhering to policy, and remaining firm, fair and consistent, direct care staff provide that level of safety and security for all detained youth. When juveniles feel safe, they tend to not act out as much, and feel more inclined to confide in staff about issues before they adopt the fight or flight mentality. By using effective communication skills, training, and experience, direct care staff are able to run a living unit effectively, and efficiently, without having to be micromanaged in their role. By building healthy and strong rapports with juveniles, while remaining firm, fair and consistent, being effective communicators, while utilizing knowledge, experience, and training skills without having to rely heavily on supervisors, can lead to promotions for higher leadership roles within the facility. Everyone being on the same page, and working towards a common goal, is an essential part of the rehabilitation process of youth in detention, and direct care staff are the front-runners in this transition.

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC), formerly known as the “Audy Home,” is the largest juvenile detention facility in the United States, housing up to 382 residents between the ages of 10 and 18. Established in 1973, the JTDC’s mission is to provide a safe, secure, and structured environment where detained youth are encouraged to make positive changes. Direct care staff are central to achieving this mission, who ensure safety while also serving as mentors and role models. The role of direct care staff within the juvenile justice system will be explored and highlight how frontline staff contribute to both youth outcomes and institutional leadership development.

Methods / Approach:

This presentation calls upon the operational practices and professional experiences of direct care staff at JTDC. By reviewing daily responsibilities, communication strategies, and staff development pathways, the presentation provides an understanding of the direct care role.

Findings / Results:

- **Role Definition:** Direct care staff provide direct supervision in living units, classrooms, and recreation areas; conduct headcounts, searches, and documentation; and respond first to crises.
- **Behavioral Management:** Through firm, fair, and consistent practices, staff set clear boundaries, treat youth equitably, and apply consequences predictably - building trust and reducing conflict.
- **Communication:** Effective verbal de-escalation, documentation, and collaboration with caseworkers and management strengthen safety and ensure coordinated care.
- **Leadership Pathways:** The direct care role builds critical competencies—emotional intelligence, resilience under pressure, and credibility—that serve as a foundation for leadership positions within juvenile detention. Career advancement is supported through training, mentorship, and merit-based evaluations.

CONCLUSION / DISCUSSION

Direct care staff are essential to the safe, structured, and rehabilitative environment of juvenile detention facilities. Their daily work influences youth behavior, facility culture, and broader systemic practices.

Importantly, the direct care role also cultivates leadership skills, making it a launchpad for future supervisors and administrators. By valuing and investing in frontline staff, juvenile detention centers can strengthen both youth outcomes and organizational leadership pipelines.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our gratitude to the staff and leadership at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center for their dedication and support, and to the residents whose resilience continues to inspire our work.

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Supporting Self-Regulation Behind the Walls: Educator Perspectives on Implementing Self- Monitoring in Juvenile Justice Classrooms

Poster | Thursday, October 2nd

*Daija Waugh, University of Maryland, College Park, Doctoral
Candidate*

ABSTRACT

Youth in juvenile justice classrooms often present with emotional and behavioral challenges that interfere with academic engagement and progress. This poster session presents findings from a mixed methods study exploring educator perceptions of self-monitoring as a classroom-based behavior support strategy. Participants included teachers, specialists, and support staff working in correctional education settings. The study identified key barriers and facilitators to implementing self-monitoring interventions, as well as professional development needs. Attendees will learn how self-monitoring can promote student self-regulation, increase instructional time, and reduce disruptive behaviors when implemented with fidelity. Practical tools, real-world educator insights, and implications for training and support will be shared. This poster session is ideal for educators seeking proactive, evidence-informed strategies to support youth with emotional and behavioral disorders in secure care settings. Come ready to reflect, engage, and walk away with actionable ideas for implementation in your classroom or program.

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