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Positive Outcomes

Strategies for Assessing the Progress of Youth Involved in the Justice System



Jeffrey A. Butts, Emily Pelletier, and Lila Kazemian

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JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE EVALUATION CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, youth justice systems are increasingly turning to the science of adolescent development to inform their intervention approaches and to measure youth success. Scientific knowledge about adolescent development is often expressed through the principles of positive youth development (PYD), a programmatic framework that encourages service providers to concentrate on the ability of all young people to thrive when they experience positive relationships and meaningful activities in supportive and safe environments.

Some youth service systems have long relied on PYD principles—e.g., out-of-school-time programs. Youth justice, however, began to embrace the PYD approach only recently. Interventions based on PYD principles are not a natural fit for youth justice systems that focus on controlling misbehavior and preventing subsequent contacts with justice authorities (i.e. recidivism).

Measuring positive outcomes in youth justice requires a shift away from recidivism as the sole indicator of program effectiveness. A youth justice system embracing the PYD approach would gauge its success by tracking positive youth outcomes, such as the formation of strong and supportive relationships, academic engagement, labor market readiness, and improved socio-emotional skills. These outcomes encourage a broader perspective on the goals of justice intervention and pursuing these goals would transform youth justice systems, making them more consistent with research on adolescent development, strengths-based perspectives, and community connections for youth. How, exactly, can youth justice systems begin to do this?

This report reviews a number of prominent frameworks that are available to help youth justice systems rely on positive outcomes rather than recidivism to measure their effectiveness. These include the Developmental Assets model, the 5Cs model, the Youth Program Quality Assessment model, the Positive Youth Justice model, and the Youth Thrive framework. Each model or framework aligns with the key principles of positive youth development as well as the large body of research on desistance from crime, which is also presented in this report.

Measuring positive outcomes in youth justice requires a shift away from recidivism as the sole indicator of program effectiveness.

Measuring Program Effects

Two types of data are used to establish the effectiveness of interventions for youth involved in the juvenile justice system: **process** and **outcome** measures. Process measures track the services provided to youth and the steps taken to achieve intended service goals (e.g., hours in a particular activity, program attendance rates, frequency of participation) (W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2004). Process measures depict program operations and the delivery of treatments and interventions. Outcome measures document the achievement of intended service goals (e.g., programs completed, milestones reached, behaviors recorded). Evaluators connect process measures and outcome measures to identify the achievement of intervention goals and their impact on youth. The development of appropriate, reliable, and valid outcome measures is essential for evidence-informed practice and policy.

Outcome measures can be grouped into **negative** or **positive** categories. Negative outcome measures observe and track undesirable phenomena, aiming to decrease or eliminate the prevalence of risk factors (Lippman, Moore, and McIntosh 2011). Recidivism is the primary example of a negative outcome measure in youth justice. The reduction or cessation of offending (i.e. absence of recidivism) is a major indicator of program success in the justice system.

In contrast, positive outcome measures capture the strengths, skills, and capabilities associated with success and the likelihood that a young person will be able to avoid future contact with the justice system. Some examples of positive outcomes in youth justice might include prosocial relationships, academic engagement, employment readiness or actual job success (Butts, Mayer, and Ruth 2005; Kazemian 2015b).

Tracking recidivism is akin to measuring the incidence of dropouts at the end of a school year, while measuring positive outcomes is equivalent to monitoring the reading and math scores of students either to celebrate their success or to identify those in need of extra help before they drop out. In youth justice, negative outcomes have been the primary measure of effectiveness, but recent shifts in theory and practice demonstrate the value and benefit of measuring positive outcomes.

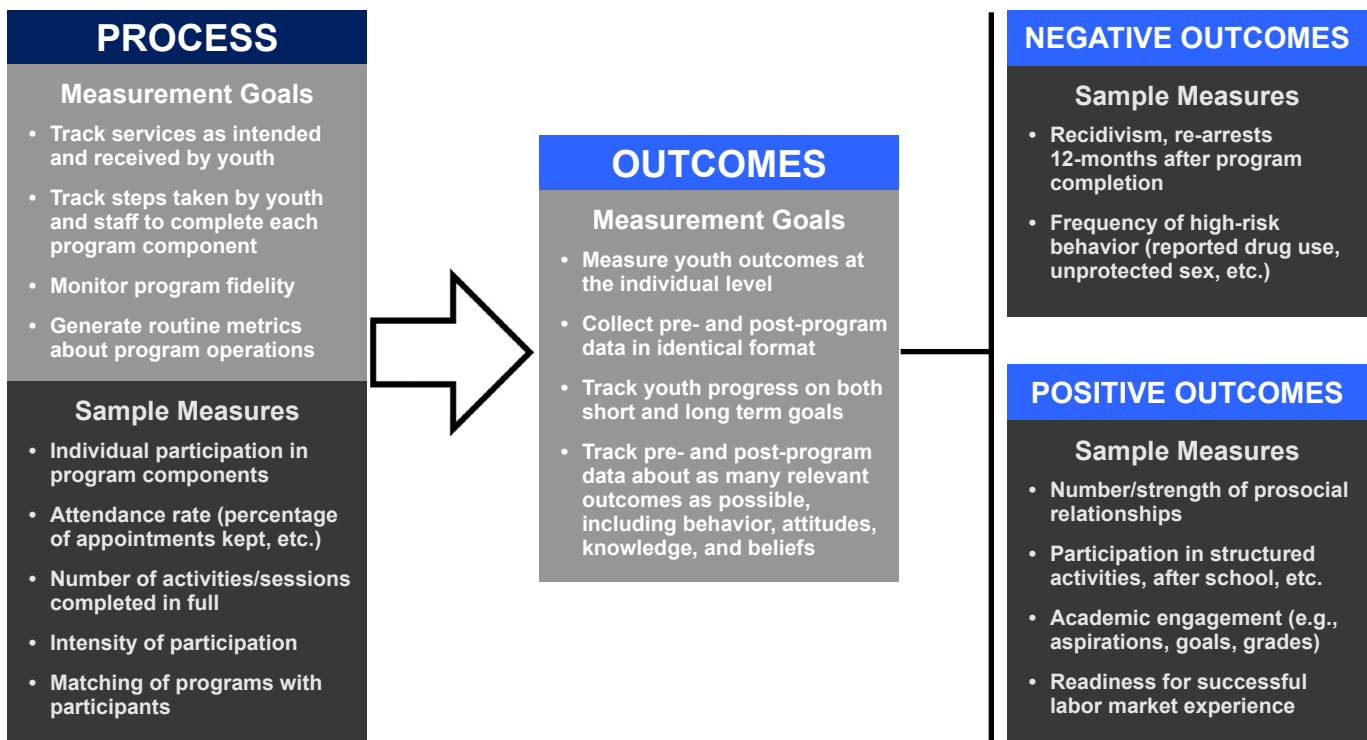
Outcome Measures in Youth Justice

Recidivism has always served as a central (often sole) outcome measure of interest in youth justice. In this way, youth justice was much like other areas of social policy. For most of the twentieth century, governments measured social well-being by tracking negative events (e.g., mortality, accidents, injuries, hospitalizations) due to limited

resources and the ready availability of such data (Ben-Arieh 2008). Public agencies monitored problems rather than progress, and policymakers naturally concentrated on reducing the incidence of problems rather than promoting positive outcomes (Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes and Moore 2003; Lippman et al. 2011; Moore and Halle 2001). In following this model, justice policymakers encouraged the public to think of youth involved in the justice system as a bundle of problems, which inevitably decreased the public's willingness to invest in youth (Lippman et al. 2011). Emphasizing positive indicators represents good science, reflects and promotes a positive vision of youth, and helps to establish an entirely different and more productive set of policy goals.

Developmental researchers once regarded adolescence as a period characterized by turmoil, disturbance, and irrationality (see Theokas, Lerner and Phelps 2005). Researchers naturally focused on negative outcome measures (e.g., delinquency, antisocial behavior, illegal substance usage, and risky sexual behaviors). This widespread reliance on negative outcomes reinforced the public's perception that youth involved in the justice system were destined to follow a negative path. In such an environment, discussions of youth justice policy and practice instinctively turned to recidivism reduction as the main indicator of success.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS



Researchers challenge the practice of measuring success as the absence of negative outcomes, recognizing that such an approach never constituted “good science” (Lippman et al. 2011). In the 1980s, intervention specialists began to view adolescence through a more holistic lens, acknowledging that while adolescence is a period of challenging transitions, it is also characterized by positive experiences such as learning, decision-making, identity formation, relationship building, and the resilience to overcome contextual stressors (Rutter 1987). Intervention programs began to shift away from clinical prevention in favor of empowerment and strengths-based initiatives (Butts et al. 2005; Lippman et al. 2011). Researchers acknowledged that formal systems could inspire adolescent desistance from crime by utilizing youths’ strengths and their capacity to succeed despite disadvantages and deficits.

Benefits of a Positive Approach

Several positive assets and outcomes have been linked with desistance from crime—the process of moving towards a law-abiding life (Kazemian 2015a). These include but are not limited to: engagement in academic, civic, moral, cultural, artistic, and/or physical activities; establishment of prosocial relationships; and development of cognitive and emotional capacities (Anderson et al. 2011; Butts et al. 2005; Lippman et al. 2011; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, and Ferber 2003; Surko et al. 2006).

Researchers worked with practitioners to establish frameworks connecting these factors with youth success and community safety. Various frameworks and validated measures exist. For example, scales exist to measure a youth’s acquisition of the developmental assets known as the “5-Cs” (i.e. competence, confidence, character, caring, and connection) as well as contribution (i.e. leadership, mentorship, and helping and volunteering behaviors). These developmental assets have been linked with youth desistance (Leffert et al. 1998; Theokas et al. 2005).

These positive outcomes contribute to the developmental process by which individuals learn to cease offending and to avoid contact with the justice system (Kazemian 2015a; Kazemian 2015b). Focusing on recidivism leads to an emphasis on failure rather than supporting the process of success. Service providers benefit from the routine measurement of positive outcomes because they are able to assess how clients move toward desistance. The youth justice field as a whole benefits because policymakers are able to identify how and why programs achieve good results.

Youth, families, service providers, and community members all instinctively support outcomes stated in positive terms (Kazemian 2015a). Disadvantaged communities in particular want practitioners to acknowledge their positive assets and their strengths rather than focusing on shortcomings. Deficit-based perspectives on youth justice outcomes portray individuals and communities as lacking in some way, as needing some type of outside intervention.

The youth justice system inhibits its own effectiveness when it relies upon negative outcomes as the central measure of impact on youth, families, and communities. By measuring success through recidivism and other negative outcomes, youth justice programs fail to empower youth with the confidence in their own potential to grow and succeed.

If youth justice interventions are intended to reduce delinquency and to prepare youth to lead full, productive lives, it is essential that youth justice outcomes capture the positive developmental elements and individual assets that are known to align with this goal. Politicians, service providers, community members, and researchers now agree that “problem-free does not mean fully prepared” (Pittman et al. 2003: 6).

The various models and frameworks described below are examples of initiatives that are successfully integrating positive developmental outcomes in services and interventions for young people involved in the justice system.

Youth, families, service providers, and community members all instinctively support outcomes stated in positive terms.

FRAMEWORKS FOR TRACKING POSITIVE OUTCOMES

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

The Search Institute of Minneapolis developed a research-based and practice-oriented youth development framework known as **Developmental Assets**. The model identifies a set of assets needed to support the development of healthy, caring, and responsible young people. The assets include interdependent external and internal factors. Adults (e.g., parents, teachers, and faith leaders) are thought to offer youth external assets such as support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. Youth then acquire their own internal assets, including a commitment to learning, the attainment of positive values, social competencies, and a positive self-identity.

Numerous studies found that as youth report an increased number of assets, they tend to display healthier development during adolescence and young adulthood. The assets approach focuses on youth assets that are derived from growing up in healthy environments established by parents, teachers, religious organizations, and communities. Internal and external assets act as protective measures against at-risk behavior and as predictors of youth thriving (Scales and Leffert 1999). Many youth-serving organizations embrace the Search Institute’s model as a useful framework that addresses the unique transition from youth to adulthood (Bonnie et al. 2013).

Evidence

The Search Institute drew on adolescent development research to create the Developmental Assets model. Adolescent development research has been inspired by various theoretical foundations, including ecological theory and social capital theory. Ecological theory examines the way in which individuals interact in different environmental contexts. Social capital theory stresses the individual benefits to be gained from facilitating social relationships in differing environments. These theories inspired the Search Institute’s focus on the diversity of institutions and relationships that affect adolescent development in everyday life.

One study reviewed the Developmental Assets model among middle and high school students (Scales et al. 2000). The study examined the association between the acquisition of developmental assets and measures for seven indicators of youth thriving. The indicators included

THE ASSETS	
EXTERNAL	INTERNAL
<p>Support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family Support 2. Positive Family Communication 3. Other Adult Relationships 4. Caring Neighborhood 5. Caring School Climate 6. Parent Involvement in Schooling <p>Empowerment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Community Values Youth 8. Youth as Resources 9. Service to Others 10. Safety <p>Boundaries and Expectations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Family Boundaries 12. School Boundaries 13. Neighborhood Boundaries 14. Adult Role Models 15. Positive Peer Influence 16. High Expectations <p>Constructive Use of Time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Creative Activities 18. Youth Programs 19. Religious Community 20. Time at Home 	<p>Commitment to Learning:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Achievement Motivation 22. School Engagement 23. Homework 24. Bonding to School 25. Reading for Pleasure <p>Positive Values:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Caring 27. Equality and Social Justice 28. Integrity 29. Honesty 30. Responsibility 31. Restraint <p>Social Competencies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 32. Planning & Decision Making 33. Interpersonal Competence 34. Cultural Competence 35. Resistance Skills 36. Peaceful Conflict Resolution <p>Positive Identity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 37. Personal Power 38. Self-Esteem 39. Sense of Purpose 40. Positive View of One’s Personal Future

school success, leadership, valuing diversity, physical health, helping others, delay of gratification, and overcoming adversity. The findings supported the association of developmental assets and thriving indicators:

- Youth acquiring multiple developmental assets reported more thriving behaviors and outcomes;
- Students with more assets were better able to maintain their physical health and to overcome adversity, and they demonstrated more leadership skills;
- Girls placed a higher value on diversity and helping others to thrive while boys were more skilled in overcoming adversity;
- Overall, developmental assets were associated with six of the seven thriving outcomes.

Another study of the Developmental Assets model examined the relationship between long-term patterns of aggressive behavior and the presence of various developmental assets (Smokowski et al. 2016). The findings underscored the link between the absence of positive assets and the incidence of aggressive behavior:

- Students who reported fighting or carrying weapons tended to lack family communication and effective skills in decision-making;
- Youth who lacked a cluster of assets tended to have ongoing conflicts with parents, were often associated with delinquent friends, and were less likely to be engaged in school;
- Aggressive behavior was associated with other negative outcomes such as poor school performance, conflicts with parents and peers, and high-risk behaviors including substance abuse and possession of weapons.

Engaging in aggressive behavior during adolescence inhibits healthy development and is associated with violence that may persist into adulthood (Aspy et al. 2004). Community assets are an important part of healthy adolescent development (Scales et al. 2001; Oliva et al. 2012). In addition to their own families, youth require the presence of important and prosocial adults, including community leaders and neighborhood residents (Sesma et al. 2013).

Scales et al. (2005) highlighted the importance of school/business/community partnerships with active adults and youth working toward common goals. Youth acquire a number of key assets from collaborative relationships with youth and adults from their schools and neighborhoods:

- Collaborative relationships enhance school connectedness and academic success. These connections provide a powerful protective influence that reduces risky behaviors and encourages youth to embrace academic success while building positive relationships among peers and adults (Kern et al. 2016).
- Effective neighborhood ties promote other key assets for youth, such as their general perception of safety and active neighborhood engagement.
- Students that acquire external assets gain more internal assets as well—especially disadvantaged youth—as they experience positive emotional and social development, including positive self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Smokowski et al. 2016).

Implications

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets model provides a comprehensive view of many of the internal and external factors that are associated with healthy adolescent development. While the number of targets may exceed the reach and capacity of youth justice systems, the model is a helpful guide for appreciating the range of factors that could help youth stay away from illegal behavior and limit their contact with the justice system. Without such a guide, it is all too easy for justice agencies to define youth needs as the absence of whatever services the agencies currently offer. Substance abuse treatment, for example, is critical for youth affected by serious drug abuse. But, being free of drug problems is not synonymous with healthy youth development. The Search Institute's model reminds systems that facilitating human development is complex and cannot be reduced to the elimination of a small set of deficits.

On the other hand, the Developmental Assets model also poses significant challenges for youth justice systems. First, as mentioned above, there are many named assets—too many perhaps to serve as a framework for justice intervention. Pursuing too many goals simultaneously could introduce a level of chaos that would render the model less than useful. How should youth justice systems set priorities? Which of the many assets are the most essential for youth already involved in the justice system? Which of them could be designated as secondary or tertiary targets for intervention?

More importantly, what should we assume about the meaning of the correlation between Developmental Assets and the probability of youth engaging in illegal acts and other risky behaviors? Research shows an association or correlation between the two—the more assets a youth appears to have the less likely he or she is to be involved in risky behaviors. But, does this mean that we can reduce risky behaviors by providing additional assets for youth? How should we do that? Many of the assets require healthy, well-resourced families and communities. Is there a way to deliver youth assets short of fixing all the social ills that have been denied them? We may know that the Developmental Assets model provides an effective framework for understanding youth development, but how can that framework be applied in youth justice?

THE 5 Cs

The 5Cs model of youth development was developed and is still promoted by researchers at [Tufts University](#). The model focuses on key attributes of adolescent development that have been found to be associated with decreases in risky behavior and increases in youths' positive contributions to their communities (Lerner et al. 2005). The 5Cs—named for a memorable alliteration—are competence, connection, character, caring/compassion, and confidence. Together, these elements combine individual and community factors thought to produce positive outcomes for youth as they progress through adolescence (Lerner et al. 2005).

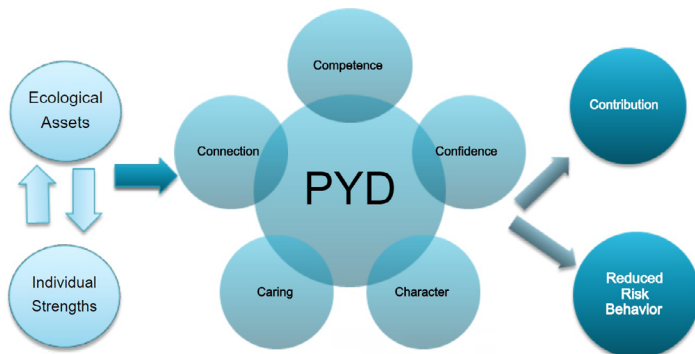
Drawing principally on the fields of adolescent psychology and human development, the 5Cs paradigm focuses on positive outcomes rather than problems and deficits. The model addresses positive outcomes in five main areas of adolescent development as identified by researchers: physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social. Ultimately, the 5Cs model encourages families, communities, and service-delivery systems to concentrate on success and to identify how youth are best able to thrive (Bowers et al. 2010).

Model Components

The notion of the 5Cs model was first articulated by Rick Little, an executive director of a youth service organization. In the early 1990s, the model was known as the 4Cs. The model stipulated that successful alignment of individual strengths with environmental and structural assets would result in positive development, reducing at-risk behaviors and increasing positive contributions to society. Since the 1990s, researchers have continued to refine the model (Lerner and Lerner 2013).

Competence entails positive views of one's actions in specific domains, including social, academic, cognitive, health, and vocational. Social competence reflects interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict resolution), while cognitive competence refers to mental-processing abilities (e.g., decision-making skills). Academic competence includes school grades, attendance, and test scores, and vocational competence measures work habits and exploration of career choices. Health competence assesses physical health through exercise, nutrition, and rest habits (Jeličić et al. 2007).

5Cs of Positive Development



Source: Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University. Medford, Massachusetts.

Connection encompasses positive bonds with individuals and institutions in which both parties contribute in a meaningful way to the relationship. These bonds may be between youth and their peers, families, schools, and community members (Jeličić et al. 2007).

Character refers to one's respect for societal and cultural norms, holding standards for correct behaviors, morality, and integrity. "Interpersonal skills, valuing diversity, personal values, and social conscience" provide indicators of character (Jeličić et al. 2007: 267).

Caring/Compassion involves a sense of sympathy and empathy for others. It involves the ability to relate to the distress experienced by others (Jeličić et al. 2007).

Confidence reflects an overall sense of positive self-worth and self-efficacy. Confidence encompasses a general regard for one's self as opposed to an assessment of smaller components of personal attributes (Jeličić et al. 2007; Bowers et al. 2010).

Over time, the effective acquisition and exercise of the 5Cs leads to the development of an additional attribute, often termed the 6th C — "contribution." Youth learn to appreciate their personal capacity to make positive contributions to their families, communities, and the broader society. As a result, they begin to engage in leadership and service activities (Jeličić et al. 2007; Bowers et al. 2010). Contribution also includes positive actions towards oneself (Jeličić et al. 2007; Bowers et al. 2010).

Evidence

Research leading to the development of the 5Cs demonstrated that not all youth experience turmoil during adolescence. They follow varied pathways through adolescence (Lerner et al. 2005). The 5Cs model views the adolescent years as a period of change and it underscores the ability of youth to navigate change successfully. It encourages an awareness of the varying environments in which adolescents develop (i.e. family, school, workplace, neighborhood, and community) and it identifies methods for helping youth to build strengths and assets in each area (Lerner et al. 2005). The 5Cs model promotes positive change by aligning individual strengths with “growth promoting resources” available through interactions with various social institutions (Bowers et al. 2010: 721).

The theoretical framework for the 5Cs model draws upon research in adolescent brain development and positive psychology, with a focus on the interactions between individuals and their social environments (Lerner 2005). During adolescence, the brain undergoes a series of neurological changes that increase the likelihood of risky or harmful behavior (Lerner et al. 2005). During this period, youth also experience changes in their relationships with others. Positive psychology holds the optimistic view that these biological and environmental changes are not simply risks. They also offer opportunities to create positive development through the alignment of individual strengths with corresponding strengths in social institutions. Previous research demonstrates that individual adolescents follow different developmental paths in part because they vary in “the systematic relations that adolescents have with key people and institutions in their social context; that is their family, peer group, school, workplace, neighborhood, community, society, culture, and niche in history” (Lerner 2005: 8; Lerner et al. 2003). Every interaction an adolescent has is an opportunity to influence his or her developmental path.

The 4H Study

A number of studies have investigated whether the five components described in the 5Cs model are actually associated with decreases in risky behavior and positive development during adolescence (Lerner et al. 2011; Bowers et al. 2010). The most influential study assessed the impact of the 5Cs model in a long-term, multi-wave study focusing on activities offered through 4-H, a well-known youth program focused on skill-building, leadership, and mentoring from adults (Lerner et al. 2013).

The longitudinal 4-H study found that youth who participated in the program tended to have higher levels of the 5C attributes, and that the 5Cs provided a valid and reliable measure of positive youth development (Phelps et al. 2009; Bowers et al. 2010). Multiple cohorts were followed in a longitudinal study of 7,000 youth from varied backgrounds in urban, suburban, and rural communities in 42 U.S. states (Lerner et al. 2011). Initiated in 2002, the study was repeated annually for eight years using youth and parent surveys with 7th through 12th grade youth (Jeličić et al. 2007; Lerner et al. 2011).

The study suggested that youth in the 4-H program displayed an increase in the 5Cs and a decrease in at-risk behavior, including smoking, alcohol consumption, and bullying, when compared with youth who did not participate in 4-H. Youth in the 4-H program also experienced lower levels of depression and had higher levels of contribution (“active and engaged citizenship”) over time (Lerner et al. 2011). Researchers attributed the findings to the relationships youth developed with “caring, competent, and committed adults” in the 4-H program (Lerner et al. 2009).

Although the magnitude of 5C outcomes varied based on grade level, gender, and socioeconomic status, the study found that involvement in the positive youth development activities of the 4-H program was associated with an increase in the 5Cs and a decrease in at-risk behavior (Jeličić et al. 2007; Lerner et al. 2011). The researchers concluded that the 5Cs model provided a valid measure of positive youth development for both early and mid-adolescence (Bowers et al. 2010; Phelps et al. 2009).

Implications

The 5Cs model provides a guide for program implementation and evaluation that aligns the 5C attributes of positive youth development with decreases in at-risk behaviors and increases in youth well-being and community contributions.

Like most models of youth development, however, the 5Cs model makes no effort to adjust its basic principles or intervention approach for the unique challenges facing youth already involved in the justice system. Other than relying on the 5Cs model as a general conceptual framework, practitioners would likely find it difficult to apply this model with justice-involved populations.

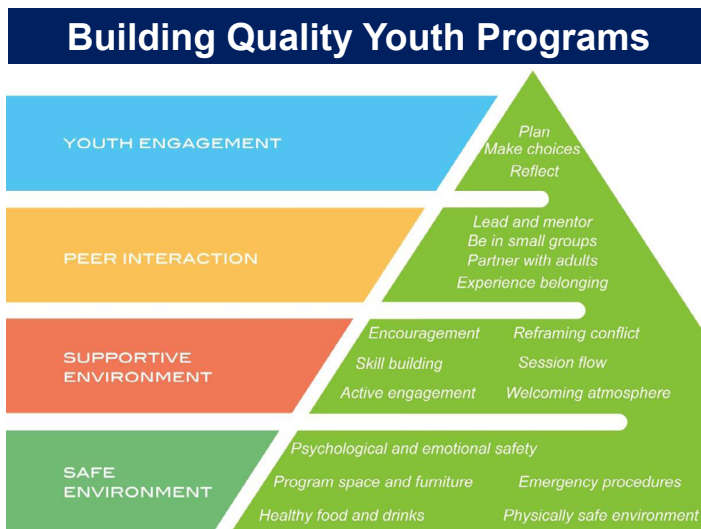
YOUTH PROGRAM QUALITY

Michigan's **David Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality** works on the implementation and enhancement of youth development programs. Based on decades of its own research and service delivery, the Weikart Center offers assessment and intervention improvement instruments for youth programs to ensure that their operations are consistent with the best research and knowledge about adolescent development.

The effective implementation of any program requires the cooperation of upper and middle management as well as its direct care or front line staff. The Weikart Center's research-based systems help youth programs set meaningful improvement goals based on data analysis, evaluation, quality assurance, and continual improvement. The Center uses its tools to help programs establish quality improvement systems that support staff. The approach is based on the "assess-plan-improve" sequence.

The origins of the Center's basic tools, the Youth Program Quality Assessment (**YPQA**) and the Youth Program Quality Intervention (**YPQI**), can be traced to the 1960s when David Weikart founded the HighScope summer youth workshops near Ann Arbor, MI. The workshops promoted positive youth development through residential and educational summer courses for young people, including art and science courses based on an active (or "hands-on") learning style. As they expanded, the workshops included social studies, mathematics, language, health, technology, physical development, literacy, and communication topics. In the 1990s, and drawing on prior research, the HighScope Summer Workshop for Teenagers prioritized positive youth development by focusing on the development of supportive and safe environments, positive interactions with staff, and productive engagement in the program.

The Weikart Center works to promote three main objectives: 1) to advance knowledge about youth settings and outcomes (i.e. the need for a safe and supportive setting in which youth can achieve desired outcomes); 2) to help out-of-school time organizations improve management practices, workforce skills, and youth outcomes; and 3) to influence national, state, and local youth policies. To achieve these objectives, the center developed two tools: the YPQA and the YPQI.



Source:
David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The YPQA is used to assess the effectiveness of youth development programs. The tool helps organizations to evaluate systems, create training modules, and craft organizational policies that support youth-staff decision-making. The YPQA approach rests on seven key elements necessary for positive youth development: 1) a safe environment, 2) a supportive environment, 3) interaction, 4) engagement, 5) youth-centered policies and practices, 6) high expectations for youth and staff, and 7) access.

The YPQI focuses on strengthening implementation practices based on a program's results from the YPQA. In other words, YPQA allows for the assessment and exploration of areas that need improvement while the YPQI provides an intervention to improve upon these limitations. Together, the YPQA and the YPQI are designed to inspire programs to pursue positive youth development with a well-supported "theory of action." The theory of action explains how positive change occurs in an organization through a process called the "cascade effect." The first step is to assess and improve upon an organization's policies and rules. The YPQA provides a rubric for conducting assessments while the YPQI guides efforts to promote and strengthen youth development. The second step consists of the organization's ability to improve the quality of management and staff, which assesses whether a program

provides staff members with the skills required to interact with one another and with youth. Staff members acquire and improve these skills through pre-service orientations, ongoing trainings, periodic assessments, and routine policy enforcement.

The most important and final portion of the cascade effect—the “point of service”—comprises all the services offered by an organization to meet the needs of youth. Together, the three steps emphasize the creation of a setting to ensure management quality and ultimately facilitate positive, healthy youth development. The YPQA and YPQI were designed to ensure the cascade effect allows programs to succeed in promoting positive youth outcomes.

Evidence

In recent years, youth programs in more than 20 states across the U.S. were using the YPQA and YPQI. States utilize the tools as a part of a full-state implementation, a local, placed-based implementation, or a combination. Several studies provide empirical support for the effectiveness of the tools. Some research suggests the YPQA effectively assesses performance-based accountability systems and the use of the YPQI is recommended to improve program quality. The YPQI is associated with increased staff tenure, improved instructional skills among staff members, and a stronger focus on staff development.

Other research found that the use of the YPQA and YPQI improve interactions between youth and families (Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality 2015). Both parents and youth report improved communication in programs using tools from the Weikart Center. In other studies, youth demonstrate positive changes in various protective factors: academic motivation, self-confidence, development of authentic relationships, trust norms, higher order thinking skills, project planning, and the ability to teach others self-assessment (Oden 1992). One study on the effects of civic education curricula showed significant increases in social tolerance, political efficacy, and civic interest (HighScope Educational Research Foundation). In another study, participants enrolled in five HighScope classes annually for a period of three years. Participants attended 2.5-hour classes and received home visits from the teacher. The results revealed lower levels of criminal involvement and higher levels of economic success among youth participants (Schweinhart 2003).

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PROGRAM QUALITY

YOUTH PQA

Form A - Program Offerings Youth - Grades 4-12

Organization name:	
Site/Program name:	
Name(s) of program offering(s) observed:	
Name of staff member(s) observed:	
Date scored:	
Name of rater (External Assessment only):	
Email for rater (External Assessment only):	

<http://www.cypq.org/downloadpqa>

Other research suggested that the use of the YPQA and YPQI resulted in greater levels of trust, reliability, flexibility, responsiveness, and social and emotional support between management and staff (Spielberger et al. 2009). Youth and their families reported feeling more supported in the program and more satisfied with the curriculum (Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality 2015).

Implications

The assessment and intervention tools developed by the Weikart Center provide a framework for youth programs to improve the quality of their efforts and to ensure that their interventions are consistent with scientific knowledge about adolescent development. The tools continue to be evaluated, but they appear to help organizations focus on the core programmatic elements, which in turn should translate to positive youth outcomes.

Unlike some other frameworks for measuring positive youth outcomes, the model promulgated by the Weikart Center is explicitly designed to guide implementation. In this way, it is potentially more useful than frameworks designed for purely conceptual or academic applications. Yet, the YPQA and YPQI were not intended explicitly for youth involved in the justice system. Programs in the justice sector could use the Weikart Center tools as a starting point, but they may have to review their utility across a variety of domains and consider making modifications or slight changes to the tools before using them.

POSITIVE YOUTH JUSTICE

The **Positive Youth Justice Model** was designed to blend the scientific understanding of adolescent development with practical intervention approaches in order to address the implementation challenges facing youth justice programs attempting to incorporate developmental principles (Butts, Bazemore and Saa Meroe 2010). The model offers an alternative to traditional, risk-focused approaches to youth justice. It also differs from deficit focused, rehabilitative approaches that concentrate on treating mental health problems, substance abuse, trauma, etc.

The PYJ model is based explicitly on the concepts and principles of positive youth development. In the past, few programs in the justice sector were designed with developmental principles, but this began to change in the early 2000s. The Positive Youth Justice model suggests that blending the science of adolescent development with the practice principles of positive youth development could serve as an effective framework for designing general interventions for youth in justice systems. The model encourages justice systems to focus on protective factors as well as risk factors, strengths as well as problems, and positive outcomes as well as negative outcomes such as recidivism.

Evidence

Two broad bodies of research and theory directly inform youth development policy and practice: social learning theory (e.g., Bandura 1977) and social control theory (Hirschi 1969). Both of these theories helped to inspire the Positive Youth Justice model.

Social control theory suggests that the strength and durability of an individual's bonds or commitments to conventional society inhibit social deviance (Hirschi 1969). The need for belonging and attachment to others is fundamental, influencing many behavioral, emotional, and cognitive processes. Numerous studies have confirmed the association between attachments and positive youth outcomes. Early sociologists even argued that all forms of social deviance, including criminal behavior, are more likely to emerge when connections between individuals and their communities are weakened (Durkheim 1947).

In one of the foundational applications of social control theory to the field of crime and delinquency, Hirschi (1969)

Positive Youth Justice Model					
PRACTICE DOMAINS	Domain-Specific Example*	CORE ASSETS			
		Learning / Doing		Attaching / Belonging	
		Activity or Opportunity	Outcome Measures	Activity or Opportunity	Outcome Measures
Work	Job readiness	Resume writing workshop	Resume submitted to potential employer	Job-seeker support group	Frequency or length of group participation
Education	Computer skills	One-on-one skill building in HTML or other language	Youth has an operating web site	Youth-to-youth tutoring program	Number of successful tutoring matches
Relationships	Communication skills	Training in conflict management	Youth completes training program	Youth-adult mentor program	Frequency and duration of mentoring relationship
Community	Youth-led civic improvement campaign	Prepare and present formal testimony	Youth speaks at public hearing	Launch new advocacy organization	Number of meetings attended
Health	Physical Fitness	Weight training	Number of training circuits completed	Team sports	Number of games played
Creativity	Self-expression	Mural art program	At least one mural designed or completed	Group performance, music or theater	Number of performances in which youth participated

* The interventions listed in the table (job readiness, computer skills, etc.) are merely examples. Ideally, a youth justice system would employ multiple interventions within each of the six practice domains, and each intervention would address both of the two core assets in the PYJ Model.

argued that the most important question is not “Why do they do it?” (i.e. why do criminals commit crime), but rather “Why do the rest of us not do it?” Social control theory offered an explanation—social bonds. When an individual's bonds to society are strong, they prevent or limit crime and other deviant behavior. When bonds are weak, they increase the probability of deviance. Weak or broken bonds do not “cause” delinquency, but rather allow it to happen. Hirschi proposed four elements that help to shape the social bonds between individuals and their society: attachments, commitments, involvements, and beliefs.

Theoreticians continue to debate the relative importance of the elements underlying social bonds (e.g., involvements), but the basic tenets of social control theory are strongly predictive and have been supported by rigorous research for decades (e.g. Wiatrowski, Griswold and Roberts 1981). Youth will be less attracted to criminal behavior when they are involved with others, learning useful skills, being rewarded for using those skills, enjoying strong relationships and forming attachments, and earning the respect of their communities. As social bonds become internal, they build social control, which deters individuals from committing unlawful acts.

Social learning theory, the second pillar of the PYJ model, views delinquency as the outcome of an experiential process in which youth learn to value their participation in crime more than they value conforming to social norms.

Social learning theory can be viewed through a strictly behavioral lens or it can include an independent role for interactions and relationships. A behavioral perspective would suggest that youth learn to engage in criminal acts through a process of rewards and punishments (Akers 1991). An interaction perspective would suggest that delinquency is learned through exchanges with peers and other close contacts. It is through relationships that youth learn to define crime as neither wrong nor deviant, and to justify their participation in illegal behavior (Elliott 1994).

Intervention practices associated with the behavioral aspects of social learning theory would seek to reduce the positive incentives for crime and to create new incentives for prosocial behavior. According to the behavioral approach, youth must unlearn delinquent behavior and adapt new patterns of positive behavior that bring different kinds of rewards, experiences, and connections. Interactional learning models would pay more attention to limiting a youth's exposure to delinquent peers. An interaction approach would emphasize group learning and ensure that youth are exposed to prosocial ways of meeting their needs rather than those associated with illegal behavior (Sutherland and Cressy 1974). For both interactionists and behaviorists, "learning by doing" is the pathway into delinquency, and it can be the pathway out.

Components

The PYJ model includes 12 components depicted as a 2 by 6 matrix. Each cell in the matrix represents the interaction of two key assets needed by all youth (**learning/doing** and **attaching/belonging**) with six separate life domains (work, education, relationships, community, health, and creativity).

To implement the PYJ Model in youth justice settings, the ideas underlying positive youth development have to be focused more narrowly. The most common approaches to PYD presume that young people possess conventional attitudes and a ready willingness to cooperate with prosocial peers and adults. These are not qualities that one finds in abundance among youth involved with the justice system. Almost by definition, justice-involved youth have a greater inclination than do other youth to violate rules, disregard convention, and defy authority.

The basic premise of the Positive Youth Justice model is that basic developmental principles could and should be adapted for interventions with all justice-involved youth. Positive development, in fact, should be the central theory of intervention with youth.

Changing the Frame			
ASSUMPTIONS	PRIMARY LENS		
	Youth as Victim	Youth as Villain	Youth as Resource
Origins of Most Delinquent Behavior	Symptom of underlying disturbance	Anti-social impulses, lack of restraint due to permissiveness and the absence of punishment	Normative response to adolescent needs for status, belonging, power & excitement, lack of empathy
How Delinquent Youth Compare with Other Adolescents	Fundamentally different in psychological and emotional makeup	Fundamentally different motivations and impulses toward deviant behavior	Largely similar to other adolescents but with fewer social assets
Delinquent Youth Capacity for Behavior Change	Incapable of conventional behavior without therapeutic interventions	Incapable of conventional behavior without strict discipline and the threat of punishment	Inherently capable of conventional behavior with sufficient access to supports and pro-social opportunities
Principal Intervention Strategy	Individual or family-based therapeutic treatment	Deterrence and retributive punishment	Skill development, attachment and engagement
Role of Treatment	Primary	Secondary	Secondary
Risks of Treatment	Could fail to address underlying cause(s)	Could delay or impede deterrence	Could introduce stigma or harm—i.e., iatrogenic effects

Of course, the PYJ model recognizes that other treatments and approaches will continue to be necessary as a supplemental response to particular subsets of youth in the justice system. Youth with drug dependencies, for example, will continue to need high-quality substance abuse treatments, even if it is clear that drug treatment programs cannot prepare them to meet every challenge they face in life. Youth with mental health problems need specialized interventions, but such programs are clearly not sufficient by themselves as a means of ensuring a positive and successful transition to adulthood.

Implications

The PYJ model suggests that all youth, even those already caught up in the justice system, need basic supports and positive opportunities if they are to avoid future criminality and lead positive and productive lives. This deceptively simple premise is backed by decades of empirical evidence, but implementing it consistently within the policy and practice structures of youth justice remains challenging.

The Positive Youth Justice model is designed to provide guidance for the conceptualization and implementation of developmentally sound approaches to interventions in youth justice systems. The model is not, however, a program or a step-by-step plan for implementation. Many details are left to the reader. Furthermore, when youth justice agencies begin to follow the PYJ approach, they will need to collect new types of data and to measure new forms of youth outcomes that are consistent with the model—i.e. positive outcomes.

YOUTH THRIVE

The **Center for the Study of Social Policy** (CSSP) works to influence public policy regarding children and families and to ensure equal opportunities and better futures. In 2011, CSSP introduced the **Youth Thrive** Protective and Promotive Factors Framework. The framework promotes positive development for all young people, from children as young as age 9 to young adults through age 26, although the special focus is on youth who are recipients of child welfare services, in foster care, or emancipated from foster care (Harper Browne 2014). Youth Thrive emphasizes the importance of understanding adolescent development for parents, families, adults working with youth, and the youth themselves. The framework focuses on five protective and promotive factors that encourage positive youth development and well-being.

Youth Thrive is based on foundational ideas derived from research in various fields, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and adolescent development (Harper Browne 2014; Harper Browne et al. 2015).

The conceptual foundations of Thrive include:

Strengths-based perspective — an alternative to the deficit-based model that usually implies low expectations;

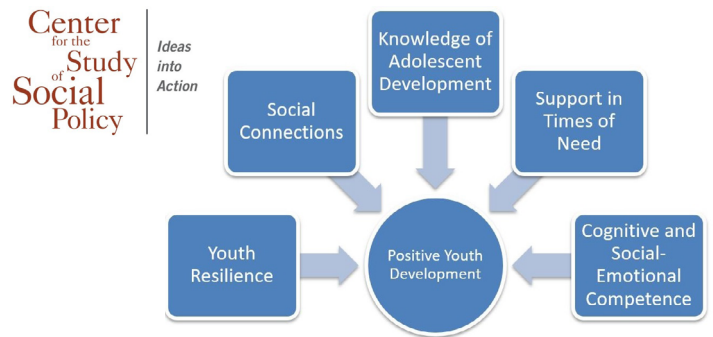
Biology of stress — stress affects youths' reactions to situations and the importance of providing a supportive environment;

Resilience theory — youth can overcome adversity with support;

Positive youth development — concepts drawn from the Five C's approach, 40 developmental assets, and the Circle of Courage model; and

Youth well-being — risk factors increase the probability of poor outcomes, protective factors mitigate or eliminate risk, and promotive factors enhance well-being.

The Youth Thrive model views adolescence as a time when youth experience significant biological, neurological, psychological, socio-emotional, and cognitive changes (Harper Browne 2014). With a focus on youth who have been in contact with the child welfare system, the Youth Thrive framework emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to and understanding of trauma experienced by youth. More specifically, the model encompasses responses to



“chronic trauma,” a type of distress that occurs over long periods of time (i.e. repeated sexual and physical abuse, family violence, and persistent neglect; see National Child Traumatic Stress Network 2003). Youth Thrive asserts that adults working with youth must have knowledge of past traumas and their damaging effect on learning outcomes, behavior, health, and the formation of trauma-related expectations (Pynoos, Steinberg, and Goenjian 1996; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2005/2014). As a result of traumatic experiences, youth may have limited expectations of adults since their previous encounters with them were negative, which in turn affects the youth’s ability to build social connections that could lead to positive youth development.

Components

Building from a review of foundational research, the Youth Thrive Protective and Promotive Factors Framework establishes five components that are expected to promote positive youth development and well-being: (1) youth resilience; (2) social connections; (3) knowledge of adolescent development; (4) cognitive social and emotional competence; and (5) support in times of need.

Youth Resilience

Youth Thrive views resilience “as the process of managing stress and functioning well in a particular context when faced with adversity” (Harper Browne 2014: 18). The model draws heavily on research about the effects of stress and/or trauma on children and adolescents. The framework promotes resilience in three ways, by: 1) fostering a secure attachment to a trusting, caring, and supportive adult; 2) teaching youth how to manage stressful events and how to respond to future stressful situations; and 3) enhancing

a youth's positive self-appraisal and sense of self-worth (Harper Browne 2014). Supportive relationships and environments are critical for strengthening youth resilience. Adults, in particular, help to foster youth resilience by understanding the past stresses and/or traumas faced by youth and by teaching them adequate skills to cope with stressors more effectively. Together, such practices decrease the impact of past stress and alter a youth's expectations of future negative outcomes.

Social Connections

Youth Thrive emphasizes the importance of social connections for youth (in the form of supportive relationships) to promote trust and belonging. In other words, youth are more likely to experience positive development when they know they matter to others in their social environments and communities (Harper Browne 2014). Previous research suggests that youth need to feel connected to someone or something in order to produce positive outcomes and to succeed. Feeling connected also serves as a protective factor against many health risks, such as alcohol use, drug use, and violence (Harper Browne 2014).

Cognitive and Socio-Emotional Competence

Youth Thrive encourages youth to develop basic skills and attitudes like self-regulation, emotional control, and problem solving (Harper Browne 2014). The framework asks adults to help youth achieve their goals. Youth Thrive is designed to build hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control, and perspective, all of which act as buffers against stress and trauma.

Support in Times of Need

Youth Thrive stresses the value of concrete support in times of need, emphasizing the benefits of youth knowing where to go for help through informal (friends, family members, or significant adults) or formal networks (teachers, school counselors, social workers). The practice of seeking help strengthens self-advocacy, a life skill critical to obtaining appropriate services when needed (Harper Browne 2014). Youth Thrive aims to reshape the paradigm for those working with youth from "What is wrong with you?" to "What has happened to you and how can I support you?"

Knowledge of Adolescent Development

Finally, Youth Thrive is also designed to foster effective agency practices. The model encourages youth, parents, family members, and any adults who interact with youth to be cognizant of the intricacies of adolescent development, particularly the fact that adolescent brains continue to develop throughout adolescence and into early adulthood, with considerable differences in the speed of individual development. The differences between the developing adolescent brain and the fully-formed adult brain contribute to differences between youth and adult responses to situations, particularly in risk-related and stress-inducing situations (Eiland and Romeo 2013).

Implications

The Youth Thrive Framework has been implemented by multiple jurisdictions at state and local levels. Findings from these agencies highlight the crucial role played by staff training. Even experienced youth workers require specialized training to understand adolescent development, trauma, strengths-based approaches, and skill development for overcoming trauma. Systems implementing Youth Thrive need agency-wide strategies to support service delivery approaches that cater to each youth's individual needs as well as regular peer-oriented activities (i.e. non-system involved youth experiences) for youth already involved with service delivery systems (Harper Browne et al. 2015).

The Center for the Study of Social Policy continues to support the application of Youth Thrive with extensive trainings, consultations, and publications designed for practitioners and agency managers. In this way, Youth Thrive might be considered the most successful effort to blend knowledge about adolescent development into the day-to-day activities of youth-serving agencies. On the other hand, the language and policy context addressed by Youth Thrive is quite broad, encompassing child welfare services as well as services for older youth. Agencies serving youth involved in the justice system may find they need to translate or alter the material provided by Youth Thrive before using it with staff and clients.

RECIDIVISM IS NOT ENOUGH

Everything in youth justice should be developmentally appropriate. Gauging the success of youth justice interventions must involve more than data about recidivism. The frameworks presented above suggest that young people learn to desist from illegal behavior over time. Desistance is defined as a process involving a series of cognitive, social, and behavioral changes leading up to the cessation of criminal behavior (Kazemian 2015a). The best way to monitor an individual's progress toward desistance is to measure his or her achievement of various milestones, primarily the positive and prosocial markers that are known to align with desistance. Deploying punitive controls and then watching for the first instance of recidivism is not compatible with developmental science.

Factors associated with desistance from offending include the strength and quality of bonds to sources of informal social control (e.g., parents, school, employment) (Bersani Laub and Nieuwbeerta 2009; Farrington and West 1995; Laub and Sampson 2001), human agency (i.e. the ability to make choices and to exert control over one's own life), the development of a prosocial self-identity (Maruna 2001), and interactions with prosocial peers (Warr 1998) (see Kazemian 2015b, for a more detailed review). Desistance occurs as a result of the combined influence of various social and cognitive factors (Bottoms et al. 2004; Giordano et al. 2002; LeBel et al. 2008).

A person's decision to abandon antisocial behavior and criminal activity is a gradual process rather than an abrupt, singular event (Bottoms et al. 2004; Bushway et al. 2001; Loeber and Le Blanc 1990). This is particularly the case for those who had an early start with frequent and intense involvement in offending. Moreover, the process leading individuals to stop offending will involve relapses and setbacks before complete and permanent cessation of crime occurs (Kazemian 2015b).

A recidivism-focused approach to measuring system effectiveness disregards the varied changes and signs of progress that may be exhibited during the emergence of desistance—e.g., increases in problem-solving skills, improvements in mental health and thinking styles, strengthening social bonds and improved social integration, and reductions in substance use (Kazemian 2012). Even if interventions do not exert an immediate and

observable impact on recidivism, they may be successfully targeting the very factors that promote the developmental process of desistance. An exclusive focus on recidivism as a measure of system impact would likely disparage the very supports that help youth to achieve desistance. Youth justice systems should be judged on their actual contributions to public safety. Recidivism is at best an incomplete measure of system outcomes (Kazemian 2015a).

Desistance vs. “What Works?”

Youth justice systems that focus on promoting desistance by measuring positive outcomes soon find themselves at odds with the prevailing “evidence-based” culture that sees the central question as, “what works?” The “what works?” model emphasizes recidivism rates because it enforces strict adherence to program models that were established by previous evaluations in which recidivism was the outcome of interest. The desistance paradigm, on the other hand, promotes harm reduction and achievement of positive outcomes associated with successful desistance. In addition, the “what works?” approach is based on the assumption that the intervention being studied was responsible for the process of change, whereas the desistance-based approach assumes a process of change exists independently of the intervention (McNeill and Weaver 2010).

An exclusive focus on recidivism as a measure of system impact would likely disparage the very supports that help youth to achieve desistance.

One of the most popular paradigms to emerge from the “what works?” literature in recent decades is the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model. This paradigm stresses three key principles that are said to be required for effective justice interventions (Andrews, Bonta, and Hoge 1990). These principles stipulate that program intensity needs to be matched to the level of risk posed by the individual; that interventions need to target criminogenic needs, which are associated with criminal behavior; and that the delivery method of the intervention needs to be adapted to the individual’s learning capabilities. The research literature shows that when programs are designed to reduce recidivism, those following RNR principles are likely to have

greater effects than those not following RNR principles (Andrews and Bonta 2014). The same literature, however, never addresses the adequacy of recidivism as the primary outcome measure for justice interventions.

Justice systems focused on recidivism reduction fail to capitalize on the advantages of measuring positive outcomes. When justice systems shift away from deficit-based interventions to emphasize strengths, youth development, and desistance, they naturally begin to rely on interventions that focus less on risk and more on the future growth and potential of young people (Ward and Brown 2004).

CONCLUSION

Adolescence is a period characterized by biological, psychological, and social change. All youth experience important transitions during this period, but not all youth have access to the resources and supportive environments required to navigate the changes. As a result, some youth react negatively to developmental transitions by engaging in antisocial and even harmful behavior. To support youth development and guard the safety of communities, the justice system should be designed to facilitate each youth’s acquisition of positive, prosocial assets and not simply focus on the avoidance of negative outcomes.

Each of the frameworks presented in this report provides strategic guidance for youth justice agencies working to ensure positive changes among the young people involved in the justice system. Each framework encourages the use of interventions that connect youth with the prosocial resources that help individuals to avoid risky behavior.

Interventions that focus on positive opportunities and outcomes are consistent with the best knowledge about promoting desistance from offending. The strongest prosocial forces in a young person’s life include supportive,

trusting, and caring relationships with adults and peers; engagement and competence in academic, vocational, and recreational activities; self-worth, including confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of personal value; socio-emotional skills, such as decision-making, conflict resolution, stress management, and compassion; and a sense of empowerment through helping behaviors, leadership skills, and civic engagement.

Monitoring youths’ acquisition of these positive assets shifts the focus of justice intervention from deficits to strengths and highlights the innate ability of all youth to navigate the challenging transitions of adolescence. Focusing on positive outcomes is also compatible with the other foundational purposes of justice intervention — accountability and public safety.

Recidivism and other negative outcomes will undoubtedly continue to be important measures in justice research and justice policy, but the positive approach is more consistent with developmental science and offers a more suitable and comprehensive framework for measuring the effectiveness of youth justice services and systems.

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