

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM IN LOUISIANA

To most effectively serve Louisiana's youth and their families, it is important that the state give priority to services that offer young people the best chance of becoming successful adults while, at the same time, maintaining public safety. When funding services or supports in the juvenile justice system, Louisiana agencies should give the highest priority to services that are community-based, that are in the least restrictive setting, and that are shown to be effective. Studies on evidence-based programs continue to consistently illustrate that they are more effective than traditional intervention methods.

Evidence-based programs are standardized, replicable practices that have been researched and demonstrate positive outcomes in repeated studies.

WHAT IS AN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAM?

An "evidence-based program," or EBP, is an approach to prevention or treatment that has been scientifically proven to work. A program that "works" with regard to juvenile justice, and frequently co-occurring mental health issues, reduces crime, delinquency, family conflict, substance use, academic failure, behavioral problems, and associations with other delinquent youth. In addition, evidence-based interventions can yield significant cost savings in both financial and human capital. For example, an evidence-based program that can successfully treat delinquent youth in a Louisiana community may cost between \$1,300 and \$5,000 per family per year, while incarcerating just one youth will cost more than \$50,000 per year. Evidence-based programs are also standardized and can be replicated. In short, to be considered "evidence-based," a program must be effective and have the ability to be implemented as designed.

Evidence-based programs have been shown to successfully treat delinquent youth in the community at a cost between \$1,300 and \$5,000 per family per year. Incarcerating just one youth will cost over \$50,000 per year, and will likely result in worse outcomes for the youth, family, and community.

WHY EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS?

Better outcomes are associated with evidence-based programs and include improved public safety due to reduced rates of re-arrest; improved family functioning and school performance; reduced rates of out-of-home placements of youth; fewer days in more costly and restrictive facilities; higher retention rates of participants with fewer program dropouts; decreased drug use and symptoms of mental illness; and cost effectiveness when compared to other interventions. Evidence-based programs also increase both provider and system accountability by directly linking services to treatment outcomes. Furthermore, recent research has shown that many practices do not work and some are even harmful. With that information in hand it is only ethical to avoid referring youth to programs with harmful effects and wastefully spending taxpayer dollars.

"Evidence-based practices are moving the fields of juvenile justice and behavioral healthcare from the conclusion of the last century that little to nothing worked to being able to repeatedly and visibly demonstrate positive outcomes for youth and families. Evidence-based practices improve the quality of care provided to youth and their families and promote child, parent, and family growth and development."

Joseph Coccozza, PhD, National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice

Benefit-to-Cost Ratios of Select Programs (Washington Institute for Public Policy, 2004)

Program	Cost/Benefit for Every Dollar Spent	Outcomes related to violence, crime/delinquency or substance use
Functional Family Therapy	\$13.25	Crime reduction
Multi-Systemic Therapy	\$2.64	Crime and drug use reduction
Multidimensional Tx Foster Care	\$10.88	Crime and drug use reduction

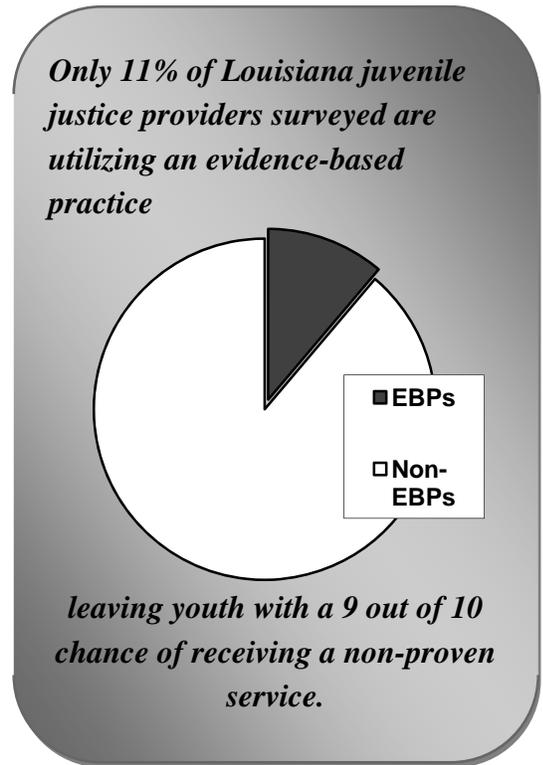
The system will not be fixed overnight, but it is ready for a bold path of action. That path includes utilizing state funds to support programs and practices that can produce the best outcomes for youth. Louisiana has already made critical initial investments in practices such as Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment, Multi-Systemic Therapy, and Functional Family Therapy (all evidence-based programs), but that just scratches the surface.

In 2007, the LSU Health Sciences Center School of Public Health and the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice conducted a survey of seven Louisiana parishes. Parish providers described 152 programs and services actively engaging youth and families affiliated with the juvenile justice system. **Of those programs and services, only 17 (11%) were associated with nationally known evidence-based programs.**

WHAT CAN LOUISIANA DO TO MOVE FORWARD IN THE ADOPTION AND UTILIZATION OF EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS?

To move from our current system in Louisiana to a more effective and reliable intervention delivery system for the juvenile justice and behavioral healthcare systems the following strategies are recommended:

- Prioritize funding for the implementation of the best evidence-based programs
- Require unproven programs to include an evaluation component to continue funding
- Discontinue funding support for programs evaluated and found ineffective
- Sustain and build capacity for evidence-based programs with mainstream funding (e.g. Medicaid, state contracts, etc.)
- Develop a workforce prepared to deliver evidence-based programs
- Assist smaller providers and rural areas in moving providers towards research informed practices (e.g. motivational engagement, cognitive-behavioral treatment, social-ecological approaches) where staffing patterns and/or budget constraints will not allow for the larger evidence-based programs (e.g. Functional Family Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy, etc.)



TO VIEW THE FULL REPORT ON EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM IN LOUISIANA GO TO THE LSU MODELS FOR CHANGE WEBSITE <http://publichealth.lsuhscc.edu/lamc/> AND CLICK ON “NEW! LOUISIANA EBP WHITEPAPER” IN THE LEFT HAND COLUMN.

For more information on the overall Models for Change in Juvenile Justice Reform initiative please visit www.modelsforchange.net .