



**Improving and Coordinating
Access to Mental Health Services
For Youth in Pennsylvania's
Juvenile Justice System**

ModelsforChange

Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice

www.modelsforchange.net

Models for Change

Models for Change is an effort to create successful and replicable models of juvenile justice reform through targeted investments in key states, with core support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Models for Change seeks to accelerate progress toward a more effective, fair, and developmentally sound juvenile justice system that holds young people accountable for their actions, provides for their rehabilitation, protects them from harm, increases their life chances, and manages the risk they pose to themselves and to the public. The initiative is underway in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Louisiana and Washington.

Understanding the Problem: The Unmet Mental Health Needs of Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

Our country's juvenile justice system was designed to hold young people accountable for their behavior and provide individualized treatment, supervision, and rehabilitation to prevent future delinquency. Increasingly, however, it is filled with youth whose troubled behavior stems from untreated mental health problems, most of whom have fallen through the cracks of other public systems, including education, child welfare, mental health, and other social services. Unfortunately, many youth are arrested and referred to the juvenile justice system merely to increase the likelihood that they receive mental health services. Recent research shows that 70 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system meet the criteria for at least one mental health disorder such as major depression, bipolar disorder, or anxiety conditions (National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, Prevalence Study). Of those, about half have co-occurring substance abuse disorders.

Many of these youth land in the juvenile justice system because their conditions are unrecognized, community services aren't available, or systems aren't coordinating effectively to put the right support in place. The juvenile justice system can be the last stop after a long journey during which a young person bounces from one system to another, with no effective support. Unfortunately, young people with mental health problems often get worse, not better, when they are inappropriately treated or confined without support. In fact, many of these youth would do better in community-based settings that provide appropriate treatment without sacrificing community safety in any way. Such an approach can produce better outcomes for these youth while at the same time reducing future offending.

Juvenile justice systems are struggling to meet the mental health needs of children. Although juvenile justice systems are not designed to be mental health service providers, when youth are committed to their care, they must keep the youth and their communities safe while providing access to appropriate treatment. They are overburdened with large numbers of youth with mental health needs who would be more adequately served elsewhere.

New approaches introduced in the past five years represent an opportunity for the juvenile justice and mental health systems to better respond to the needs of these youth. These

advancements include improved screening and assessment to identify youth with mental health disorders, policies and services that support family involvement, programs that divert appropriate youth from the juvenile justice system to services, increased access to effective programs in communities, and enhanced coordination between juvenile justice and other youth-serving systems (Skowrya & Cocozza, 2007). Juvenile justice systems can be strengthened while meeting the needs of the young people they serve.

“We are committed to creating a juvenile justice system that not only holds young people accountable for their actions, but also provides effective rehabilitation while recognizing the important developmental differences between young people and adults.”

—PENNSYLVANIA GOVERNOR
EDWARD G. RENDELL

Pennsylvania: Building a Stronger System and Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Youth

Pennsylvania has long been recognized as a national leader in juvenile justice innovations and reforms. Through the leadership of the Juvenile Detention Centers Association of Pennsylvania, in 2000 Pennsylvania became the first state in the nation to adopt the standardized and scientifically sound Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument-Second Version (MAYSI-2) in most detention centers (Keystones for Reform, 2005). The MAYSI-2 allows detention centers to determine which youth may be in need of mental health assessments and to collect important information about the mental health problems of admitted youth. County-specific data have allowed detention administrators to get additional staff and coordinate with local mental health departments to better serve the mental health needs of youth and to keep them safe.

“Our goal is to support every Pennsylvania county in developing, through a collaborative effort among all child-serving systems and families, a comprehensive system that features the key components of identification, diversion, short term interventions and crisis management, evidence-based treatment and continuity of care/aftercare planning for youth with mental health needs and co-occurring substance abuse issues.”

—MENTAL HEALTH/JUVENILE JUSTICE JOINT POLICY STATEMENT, SEPTEMBER 2006

With support from Models for Change, Pennsylvania is coming closer to a system in which all youth referred to juvenile justice systems and probation departments receive appropriate screening and assessment to divert youth from the juvenile justice system and have access to the mental health services they need. When youth are in the juvenile justice system, these services are provided within the context of the principles of balanced and restorative justice, which addresses protection of the community, accountability for offenses committed, and development of competencies to enable youth to become responsible and productive members of the community.

Core goals of the Pennsylvania initiative

- TIMELY** screening and identification of youth with mental health challenges to juvenile probation departments;
- DIVERTING** appropriate youth out of the juvenile justice system and into other programs that are better able to address the needs of youth with behavioral and mental health challenges;
- PROTECTING** youth from having their statements used against them in court when they in good faith share information during court-ordered mental health screenings, assessments, or treatment;
- PROVIDING** adequate and effective mental health services to youth in the juvenile justice system; and
- INVOLVING** families in the mental health care of their children.

On a statewide level, a working group has created a joint policy statement to inspire commitment to change. The Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Joint Policy Statement was signed by administrators of state entities working in juvenile justice in Pennsylvania, including the departments of Public Welfare and Education, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, the Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program Administrators Association, and the Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania.

The statement serves as a blueprint for juvenile justice policy and programs in the state and commits to the goal of achieving, by 2010, a model system that would:

IDENTIFY youth with mental health needs;

PROVIDE timely access to treatment in the least restrictive environment;

PREVENT unnecessary involvement of youth with mental health needs with the juvenile justice system;

ENGAGE families in the care and treatment of young people; and

COORDINATE services with multiple agencies.

At the county level, Models for Change is working to improve mental health services by supporting three model counties that participated in the Comprehensive Systems Change Initiative (CSCI), a strategic-planning model developed by the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice in a joint effort with the National Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators and Policy Research Inc. CSCI brings together juvenile justice and mental health systems to develop a comprehensive and coordinated service delivery system so that all youth, and especially the growing numbers in the juvenile justice system, have access to effective mental health services.

Models for Change mental health activities are concentrated in three “model” counties

ALLEGHENY COUNTY is working to identify youth in the juvenile justice system who have a mental health disorder; ensure that the probation department has the information needed to communicate with mental health service providers; and make the mental health system the main place where young people are assessed and treated.

CHESTER COUNTY is working to improve its ability to identify youth with mental health problems early in the process; expand community-based treatment and evidence-based practices; and engage family in young people’s mental health treatment.

ERIE COUNTY is working to implement screening and treatment for the unique needs of youth receiving probation supervision; expand the ability of the juvenile court and the probation department to identify the mental health needs of young people; expand community-based treatment and evidenced-based practices; and increase the funding and resources available to meet these goals.

Learn More

To learn more about the organizations mentioned in this document, visit:

Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators: www.cjca.net

Juvenile Court Judges' Commission: www.jcjc.state.pa.us

Juvenile Detention Centers Association of Pennsylvania: www.jdcap.org/jdcap

Juvenile Law Center: www.jlc.org

Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania (MHAPA): www.pachildrensnews.org

Models for Change: www.modelsforchange.net

National Center for Juvenile Justice: www.ncjj.org

National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice: www.ncmhjj.com

National Youth Screening Assistance Project (MASYI-2 Info):
www.umassmed.edu/nysap

Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency: www.pccd.state.pa.us

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