

# Illinois Juvenile Justice Research and Information Consortium

## *Briefing Document*

### Overview of Screening and Assessment in Illinois' Juvenile Justice System Update: November 2014

*This discussion of screening and assessment in the Illinois juvenile justice system is one in a series of briefing documents highlighting key programs or components of the state's juvenile justice system. These briefing documents are intended to inform and assist researchers, policy makers and practitioners and to respond to queries posed by the Illinois Juvenile Justice Leadership Council.*

**Overview:** Structured, objective and validated screening and assessment tools provide decision-makers with reliable and relevant information to guide decisions about care, supervision and services for individual youth in contact with or involved in the juvenile justice system. Some tools—like the MAYSI-2 – provide immediate information about a youth's behavioral health needs, which can guide crisis responses and longer-term care. Other tools, such as the YASI, provide more detailed, objective information on a youth's risk of reoffending, which can ensure that the right youth receive the right intensity and type of services and supervision. Still other tools, such as the CANS, provide critical information regarding a youth and family's strengths and needs, including exposure to traumatic events, and assist in development of an individualized caseplan for that young person. A growing body of research indicates the importance of targeting the right intensity and type of services to youth and families and demonstrates that over-intervening with low-risk young people can disrupt support networks, stigmatize, and contribute to poor outcomes.

Screening and assessment information is valuable not only in guiding those working directly with young people but also in providing a rich data source for researchers and policy-makers. Aggregated assessment results can help supervisors manage staff caseloads and gauge the impact of specific programs or intervention strategies. Policy makers can utilize aggregate assessment data to develop or fund programs and services which best meet the demonstrated needs of young people in a particular community or facility. Researchers can use aggregate assessment data to create profiles of the needs, risks, strengths and / or outcomes of particular populations of youth involved in the justice system and can help identify trends and emerging issues the justice system must address.

This document discusses three screening or assessment tools (or processes) currently in use at important decision-points in Illinois' juvenile justice system: MAYSI-II, CANS and YASI.

#### **MAYSI-2 (Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument):**

The MAYSI-2 is a standardized tool for use in screening youth in the justice system for potentially urgent mental health problems requiring immediate attention. It is intended for youth ages 12 – 17 and is used at key entry points (such as admission into a detention facility or entry into a new program) or when a significant event or change occurs in the youth's life. Created by the National Youth Screening Assistance Project (NYSAP) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the MAYSI-2 is not intended for use as a diagnostic or in-depth assessment instrument. It is a relatively brief questionnaire which serves as a "triage" tool to identify the need for immediate intervention, such as suicide precautions, and is usually used when little other information is available or a full assessment has not yet been conducted.

The MAYSI-2 does not take the place of, but can complement, more targeted or comprehensive assessments to guide decisions about long-range placement or treatment planning. The tool includes 52 true / false questions to youth and typically takes about 15 minutes to administer, usually by non-clinical staff. The MAYSI-2 provides information on a range of behavioral health needs, including suicide ideation, thought disturbance, traumatic experiences, somatic complaints, alcohol / drug use, anger / irritability and depression or anxiety.

**Detention use:** In Illinois, the MAYSI-2 is used in some secure detention facilities to screen youth upon admission. Its use by detention facilities is voluntary and is not mandated or coordinated at the state level.<sup>1</sup> Responses to MAYSI-2 findings are developed and implemented locally as well. The data generated by the use of the MAYSI-2 is maintained by the detention facility and may or may not be shared with other local practitioners, depending on the policies in place in that county or circuit. The data is not collected, shared or analyzed at the state level

**IDJJ use:** MAYSI-2 is also used by the Department of Juvenile Justice at its Reception and Classification Centers, upon a youth's admission to a secure DJJ Youth Center. With significant support and assistance by Models for Change and NYSAP, DJJ staff have been trained to administer and effectively use MAYSI findings to identify youth in potential mental health crises and to develop immediate responses and strategies to keep the youth safe. With NYSAP assistance, DJJ also developed internal policy and practice on the sharing of individual screening results with staff working with youth and in the use of aggregate data to guide development of mental health programming and services. MAYSI was fully implemented in 2012; DJJ anticipates sharing aggregate data and findings with external stakeholders beginning in summer 2013.

#### **YASI (Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument):**

The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument measures an individual youth's level of risk for delinquent conduct, key areas of programming or service need and protective factors or strengths which can be fostered to produce positive outcomes for the youth and family. YASI was developed in the late 1990s and is based on a tool developed by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP), with validation studies in Illinois, Washington, New York, Vermont, and Alberta and in California, where the tool has been adapted for use in secure juvenile facilities.

The YASI utilizes a series of structured questions and assimilates a variety of information from independent secondary sources (such as school records, police reports, family interviews, etc.) in ten "domains," including legal history, family, school, community / peers, alcohol / drug use, mental health, violence / aggression, attitudes / values / beliefs, skills and use of free time. Assessment results provide a profile of each youth's *risk* levels (low, moderate, high or very high); particular areas of *need* (as well as areas of non-need); specific *protective factors* and strengths and domains in which protective factors can be bolstered. The YASI Caseworks program then assists the probation officer or service provider in developing an individualized plan for each youth which includes the youth's perspectives and goals and strategies to motivate positive change and incentivize progress.

The YASI is *not* a specialized tool for assessment of mental health, education, abuse and neglect, substance abuse, trauma or other specialized needs youth may present. Instead, the YASI is a more generalized tool intended to be used in conjunction with – and not instead of -- specialized assessment strategies, when needed. It should also be noted that the YASI enables (and encourages) periodic

---

<sup>1</sup> NYSAP provided training and technical assistance in implementing the MAYSI-2 to selected Illinois detention centers in 2008-2010 to study the impact of screening on detention center policy and practice.

reassessment to continually assess progress toward goals, changes in risk and needs and determine readiness for discharge or step-down.

**IDHS Programs:** The Illinois Department of Human Services has designated the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument for use with youth referred to DHS Youth Services programs such as CCBYS and Redeploy Illinois. CCBYS<sup>2</sup> serves as the state’s primary safety network for young people who are not DCFS wards and are experiencing crisis or conflict; law enforcement, schools and families can refer a youth to CCBYS programs to avoid unnecessary arrest, detention and / or juvenile justice system involvement. Redeploy Illinois<sup>3</sup> programs are situated at the other end of the youth services spectrum, serving youth adjudicated delinquent who would otherwise be committed to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. Both programs utilize the YASI assessment tool to identify a youth’s risk levels, primary areas of need and protective factors which represent the youth’s support, strengths and resilience. This assessment data is used by service providers to craft an individualized plan for each youth and to periodically re-assess for changes and progress. YASI data is reported to DHS via the e-Cornerstone data system maintained by the department.

**Juvenile Probation:** In 2003, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts adopted the YASI as the statewide juvenile assessment tool to be utilized by all probation departments in Illinois. Since 2006, Illinois probation practitioners have been required to perform a YASI with every youth placed on probation, with the tool now in use by all 64 probation departments serving Illinois’ 102 counties. Probation officers use the YASI assessment data to develop individualized caseplans based on each youth’s risk levels – with higher risk youth requiring more supervision and support and low risk youth requiring less intrusion or intervention – and key areas of need. The assessment and caseplan also prompt officers to work with youth to build on the protective factors, strengths and assets in their lives and to use positive reinforcement and incentives to build the youth’s intrinsic motivation rather than relying on sanctions and external controls.

YASI assessment information from probation departments is maintained, through a web-based application, in the state’s “Caseworks” system. The YASI process produces valuable *aggregate* data, in addition to providing and gathering critical information on individual youth. Aggregate YASI data has been maintained by each probation department since 2006 through local data systems and servers and is used by department supervisors to manage caseloads and resources within the department and to measure the efficacy of specific strategies and services over time. On a broader level, this aggregate data can be useful to departments in communicating about the scope and efficacy of their work to local and state partners. Local planning groups, such as Juvenile Justice Councils,<sup>4</sup> can utilize this aggregate data to better understand, respond to and communicate about the needs of youth and families in their community.

**YASI in IDJJ:** Beginning in 2015, the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice will utilize the YASI to develop individualized caseplans for all youth in their custody. YASI planning and implementation began in November 2014, with an accelerated time table in place for full utilization of the tool for case planning and reassessment in 2015. Individual and aggregate YASI data will be maintained in the Department’s new “Youth 360” database, currently in development. Also in early 2015, the Department expects to test access and use of the risk and needs assessment conducted by probation departments on the youth committed to IDJJ custody. With the collaboration of local probation departments and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, IDJJ will access probation Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI)

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Illinois’ crisis response and diversion program, see the CCBYS brief in this series.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Redeploy Illinois program, see the Measureable Progress brief in this series.

<sup>4</sup> The Illinois Juvenile Court Act encourages the creation of local Juvenile Justice Councils at 705 ILCS 405/6-12.

results from probation departments, when youth on their caseloads are committed to the Department. Access to YASIs conducted by probation departments will assist IDJJ in more fully understanding and meeting the needs of youth in their care, as well as changes in those risks and needs over time and the youth's responsivity to prior services and support.<sup>5</sup>

### **Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS):**

The Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool was developed by Northwestern University in the late 1990s as an "open domain tool" which is free for use in service delivery systems that address the mental health of children, adolescents and their families. The copyright is held by the Praed Foundation of Chicago, to ensure that the tool remains widely available. Nationally, the CANS is primarily used in the child welfare or child services fields, including juvenile justice systems, to identify and communicate behavioral health care and related needs and strengths of children and their families.

The basic tool includes domains for life / functioning, child strengths, acculturation, caregiver needs and strengths, child behavioral / emotional needs and child risk behaviors, with additional targeted modules for developmental needs, trauma, substance use disorders, violence, emotional / behavioral risks, resiliency, sexually-abusive behaviors and running away. There are also "juvenile justice" and firesetting modules available. For need items, the CANS utilizes a scale of 0 (no evidence of needs) to 3 (requires immediate or intensive action). For strength items, the scale ranges from 1 (a "centerpiece" strength) to 4 (no strength identified).

**IDCFS Use:** In Illinois, the CANS is used extensively by the Department of Children and Family Services caseworks to identify issues requiring immediate and longer term intervention, to target strengths which can be relied upon and / or built in the caseplan and to develop a caseplan with the appropriate intensity and level of services or care. CANS results inform treatment decisions and placements with foster care, residential treatment, outpatient care and / or community-based services providers. CANS results and reassessment can also be utilized to communicate with families regarding the caseplans in place and to identify and recognize family strengths and areas of progress.

**IDJJ Use:** With funding and support of the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, IDJJ launched an extensive effort to implement and utilize validated, structured assessment tools, particularly at its Reception and Classification centers. In addition to implementing the MAYSI (as discussed above, and with Models for Change support), the Department piloted the use of the CANS with all youth committed to its care, with the goal of informing individualized "Youth Development Plans" and guide care, services and supervision of youth while in custody. IDJJ's efforts to pilot use of the CANS indicated that the Department needed a tool more attuned to the concepts and language of risks for further delinquent conduct and protective factors which could prevent reoffending and produce positive youth outcomes. As discussed above, IDJJ is discontinuing use of the CANS and transitioning to the use of the YASI as its primary risk, need and protective factor assessment tool.

*The Illinois Juvenile Justice Research and Information Consortium is supported by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change initiative. For more information on Illinois Models for Change, go to [www.modelsforchange.net](http://www.modelsforchange.net).*

---

<sup>5</sup> This brief discusses two of the many screening and assessment tools in use by IDJJ, as these tools (MAYSI-2 and YASI) are or will be utilized the most consistently for all youth in IDJJ care. IDJJ uses a number of targeted assessment tools for a range of issues, including mental health assessments such as the VDISC / VISA, substance abuse assessment tools such as the GAINS, educational assessment tools and many others.