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SUCCESSFUL REENTRY

by Rachel Stephenson

Every year, approximately 100,000 juvenile justice-involved youth exit out-of-home placements and reenter the community. Reentry and aftercare programs are designed to help youth successfully reintegrate back into the community and overcome the problems they may face after returning from residential placements.

Research on such programs have found several elements crucial to the successful reintegration of youth: starting reentry services during placement and continuing those services following release; involving family members and other prosocial individuals during the transition process; assessing youths' risks and needs to provide them with appropriate services; and focusing on important parts of reintegration, such as education, to ensure successful reentry.

The National Reentry Resource Center's Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice is working to develop resources for the successful reentry of juvenile offenders. In a 2011 publication, the Committee identified five key areas emerging in youth reentry policy and practice:

1. Integrating the science of adolescent brain development into the design of reentry initiatives.
2. Ensuring reentry initiatives build on youths' strengths and assets to promote prosocial development.
3. Engaging families and community members in a meaningful way through the reentry process.
4. Prioritizing education and employment as essential elements of a reentry plan.
5. Providing a stable, well-supported transition to adulthood that helps create lifelong connections.

Evidence-based reentry programs specifically target youth reentering the community. Operation New Hope (formerly Lifeskills '95) is a curriculum-based aftercare treatment program designed to assist chronic high-risk juvenile offenders as they

REAL-TIME PREVENTION FOR ACTING OUT

by Dave Marsden



When we think of violent acts committed or witnessed by young people, we often view prevention as a long-term investment that begins when children are young and takes years to "pay off." But there is another variety of prevention for those who work with youth in residential facilities,

hospitals, schools, etc.—people who are required to defuse potentially violent situations on an ongoing basis. Despite all the situations that can arise during a day in the life of a youth, there are only seven precipitating factors that contribute to acting out. This type of behavior results from events and circumstances that play out as young people interact with peers and staff.

As the director of a secure juvenile detention center for 17 years, I was trained in several nonviolent crisis intervention disciplines. The **Crisis Prevention Institute** (CPI) of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and **Handle with Care** (HWC) of Gardiner, New York, provided outstanding training for those who worked with young people in institutional or formal settings. One of the core components of training was how to stabilize violent behavior. CPI participants say the program approaches issues with **long-term preventive solutions** rather than relying on staff to act appropriately when faced with aggression. It's a common-sense method that helps organize thinking about chaotic moments. Staff identify behaviors that may escalate into dangerous situations, and defuse such situations through nonverbal and verbal intervention strategies.

HWC has provided school staff training for managing students from Pre-K–12 since 1985. Their **verbal intervention programming** integrates two models of thinking: 1) understanding the cycle of violence and different points along the continuum where people may be, so interventions can target their needs, and 2) a self-awareness model that identifies common triggers staff need to be aware of to monitor and control youths' reactions and provide better care.

CPI's seven precipitating factors that lead to acting out are as follows:

Fear: A youth is likely to act out because of fear when he or she is in an unresolved conflict with a peer or is being placed in a setting for the first time. Psychologically, a young person placed in a new setting may be unconsciously asking, "Can you control me? Because if you can't ... how can you protect me?" One way a youth expresses this uncertainty is by physically acting out—testing how authority figures deal with the situation. The HWC curriculum asks, "Are you a solid object that a youth can reach out and touch, or does the hand go right through you because you are not a solid person and therefore not worthy of trust?" I have seen great bonds develop between a scared kid and a staff member who handled him or her appropriately, even in a violent moment when the staff member chose to restrain the youth in a nonviolent and compassionate way.

Failure: The youth we work with every day have often experienced a life of continued disappointment and failure. School, sports, and

reintegrate into the community after being released from secure confinement. The treatment consists of 39 hours of programming completed over 13 consecutive weekly meetings that focus on different coping skills. Primary treatment topics include dealing with emotions, expectations, family dynamics, and living with addiction. A 1999 evaluation found the program had significant, positive impacts on recidivism (including arrests), substance abuse, employment, and social behavior.

Another aftercare program is a form of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) called Family Integrated Transitions (FIT). The program provides integrated individual and family services to juvenile offenders who have co-occurring mental health and chemical dependency disorders. Services begin in the youth's final 2 months at a residential facility and continue for 4–6 months during parole supervision. The program includes components of MST, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, and Motivational Enhancement Therapy. An evaluation found it had a significant impact on felony recidivism rates (although it did not impact misdemeanor recidivism rates).

The Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI) is a voluntary interagency public safety program that helps high-risk adult male offenders between ages 17 and 30 transition back to their neighborhoods following release from local jails. The goal is to reduce recidivism with mentoring services, case management, social service assistance, and vocational development. Services begin with the creation of a transition accountability plan, continue with a family member or case manager who meets the offender on the day of release, and move forward with services provided in the community. An evaluation of the program found arrests for all crimes (violent crimes included) were significantly lower for BRI participants compared with a control group. Even after 3 years, BRI participants were 30 percent less likely to have been rearrested for a violent crime.

Several federal grant programs have also been developed in recent years, providing community funding to support delivery of comprehensive reintegration services. The Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative (SVORI) was designed to assist adult and juvenile offenders upon their release from incarceration in areas such as employment, education, health, and housing. SVORI provided federal funding to 69 state and community agencies to enhance reentry services for returning offenders. It was a results-oriented initiative as local programs needed to achieve specific outcomes and goals in services provided to offenders. However, the structure and implementation of enhanced reentry services offered by community programs varied substantially by site. Overall, a multisite evaluation of SVORI found reentry services did not have a significant impact on offenders, including juvenile offenders, with regard to measures of housing experience, employment, substance abuse, or criminal behavior. Part of the problem may have been the variation in services provided by sites, and the difficulty in identifying a "program" to evaluate because of the customized nature of services offenders were receiving.

The Second Chance Act was signed into law in 2008 to fund programs that help improve outcomes for people returning to the community after incarceration, and reduce their odds of recidivating. The Act was developed from research on reentry and lessons learned from prior attempts to improve reentry efforts (including SVORI). Federal grants provided under the Second

relationships may have gone poorly, and new situations are merely an opportunity for more humiliation. Why not act up right away and avoid the embarrassment? I once brought a young man to his new classroom in a group home and introduced him to his teacher. The class was reading from a school book at the time and the new student was asked to read paragraph four aloud. He stood up, grabbed the table and flipped it, simply because he could not read. From his perspective, it was better to be seen as volatile than thought of as stupid or incapable. The situation was a true learning lesson for me and I never let it happen again. For the next 18 years, new students were always interviewed by the teacher to determine their learning levels and capabilities before setting foot in an unfamiliar classroom.

Frustration and resentment may also stem from learning disabilities (LDs), according to the [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#). As kids move into middle school, [behavioral signs of LD](#) include resisting class work or homework, refusing to follow the teacher's directions in order to get sent from the room, cutting class, and bullying.

Displaced Aggression: A trip to court, an appointment with a social worker or probation officer, a disappointing visit from family members, or abuse or bullying that recently took place—all of these scenarios can trigger acting out due to displaced aggression. In cases like these where you are present and the source of the anger is not, look out.

Maintenance of Self-Esteem: Regardless of the organization or role, not once did we allow staff or youth to refer to each other by their nicknames. Depending on a child's situation, a well-intended handle can easily turn into an insult that leads to an assault. Responses vary depending on who uses the nickname, inflection and tone, and the state of the person being referred to. An abbreviation like "Bob" is likely safe, but "Shorty" or "Razor" could cause any number of problems, resurfacing bad memories or reinforcing negative roles.

To the furthest extent possible, behavior should be corrected offstage—not publicly, if it can be avoided. Snapping fingers at someone, using "hey you" to get his or her attention, or taking a teasing or condescending tone may eventually lead to trouble. The behavior we model teaches young people how to act and interact appropriately.

Loss of Personal Power: Treating everyone in a community facility or classroom the same way may challenge those who see themselves as adults to show you just how wrong you are. A 17-

Chance Act have funded programs related to substance abuse treatment, family programming, reentry courts, mentoring, housing, and victims support. Part of the legislation directed the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to evaluate the effectiveness of demonstration projects receiving funding. As opposed to one large multisite evaluation that was conducted for SVORI, NIJ is funding various evaluations to examine different Second Chance Act projects. Many of those evaluations are still ongoing; therefore, the effectiveness of the Second Chance Act is not yet known.

Additional information on Operation New Hope, MST-FIT, BRI, and SVORI can be found on NIJ's [CrimeSolutions.gov](#).

Rachel Stephenson is a Research Analyst at Development Services Group, Inc.

NEWS & VIEWS

Reports

Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012

Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics, 2013

The Bureau of Justice Statistics has released "[Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012](#)," reporting on current crime and school safety data. Twenty-one indicators of school crime are described, including victimization at and away from school, teacher injury, bullying and cyberbullying, weapons, and schools' safety and security measures.

2013 Short Report on Youth Mental Health

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013

This [report](#) addresses challenges faced by young adults. More than one fourth of young adults surveyed had experienced four or more types of potentially traumatic events, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, or witnessing domestic violence. Nearly 20 percent of young adults aged 18–25 had a mental health condition in the past year—of these, more than 1.3 million had a severe disorder that compromised their ability to function. The Children's Mental Health Initiative, aimed at improving mental health outcomes from birth to age 21, funds grantees to put system-of-care principles into practice by helping adolescents and young adults obtain services and supports, build partnerships with their families and communities, and use evidence-based practices to improve functioning at home, in the classroom, and in other areas of life.

Four in 10 Teens Have Experienced Dating Violence: What Parents and Providers Can Do

Funded by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2013
More than one in three teens has experienced dating violence, according to a recent [study](#). The report was based on data from a

year-old in a group setting who has been out of school for 2 years, fathered a child, been shot, and continues to sell drugs for a living must be handled differently than a youth who has run away for the first time. Clearly, not all youth are the same, and therefore must be treated differently. Pulling a youth aside, confirming his or her status, and asking respectfully for cooperation is likely to yield better results.

Attention Seeking: Many young people who are engaged in service systems cannot communicate well. Whatever the cause—parenting deficiencies, abuse and neglect, immaturity—the result is often an inability to express needs. Some children simply don't know how to appropriately get the attention of an adult to discuss a problem or ask for something. Experience has taught them if they act out, an adult will have to pay attention and may lead to getting what they need or want.

Mental Illness/Impairment: Some young people are suffering from diagnosable disorders that can lead to acting out. While very few youths are psychotic (the onset of psychosis is generally in early adulthood or later), mood disorders, autism, and developmental or intellectual disabilities can result in defiant behavior, as the youth does not have skills or abilities to cope with stressful circumstances. Use of illegal substances can also cause acting out.

We used to teach our staff to take inventory every day and ask this question: If each child in our care acts out today, what would likely be the cause? What would precipitate the behavior? A thoughtful answer to that question allows you to head off trouble at the pass. This approach is "real time" prevention. Thoughtful preparation and modeling of appropriate behavior is the heart of leading by example, and smart policy for those who interact with young people on a daily basis.

Dave Marsden is the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention Technical Assistance Director.

UPDATES

American Bar Association Endorses Task Force Recommendations to Address Children's Exposure to Violence

On August 12, 2013, the American Bar Association (ABA) House of Delegates unanimously approved a resolution supporting implementation of 56 policy recommendations from the **"Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence (CEV)"**. According to the ABA, "the

national online survey to assess victimization and perpetration of dating violence.

OJJDP Family Listening Sessions Executive Summary

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2013

Four **listening sessions** were convened by OJJDP in 2011 to provide the Office, state juvenile justice agencies, and other stakeholders with a greater understanding of challenges families face when their child becomes involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system. Common themes were noted as well as recommended improvements for criminal and juvenile justice systems.

News

Campaign to Provide Safe Passage on Way to School

Along the Safe Passage routes, 1,200-plus workers **watched over students** as they made their way back to school. While many cities have programs to help children get to and from school safely, few are as extensive as Chicago's—proof of the city's intense commitment to violence prevention and education.

The Secret for Preventing Youth Violence

Seven months after 730 8th- through 12th-grade students in Chicago completed a 2012 **summer jobs program** that aimed to give teens social skills and support, participants noted a substantial (51 percent) drop in arrests.

Stopping the Slaughter

Philadelphia's Mayor Michael Nutter **calls for action** to end the gun violence that claims some 32 victims a day in the United States. Seventy-five percent of homicide victims in the city are black men, as well as about 80 percent of those arrested for homicide. Mayor Nutter says a partnership is in order for cities, states, and federal agencies and corporate, philanthropic, religious, and social advocacy communities to break the cycle of violence that has plagued Philadelphia for too long.

Other Resources

Recent studies associating bullying with depression and suicide led the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to convene an expert panel. In conjunction, the *Journal of Adolescent Health* released a **special online supplement** examining the relationship between bullying and suicide among youth. Three findings were key: bullying is a significant public health problem; a strong association exists between bullying and suicide-related behaviors; and public health strategies can be applied to prevent bullying and suicide.

In an effort initiated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to end teen dating violence, organizations, advocates, students, and violence prevention professionals have submitted short **Public Service Announcements**. On September 6, winners of the "I Veto Violence Because ..." contest will be announced.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

violence (CEV). According to the ABA, the recommendations of the CEV report regarding youth in the juvenile justice system seek to ensure that youth who have been exposed to violence receive the services they need to address its effects, [and] also promote the idea that youth in the juvenile justice system should not be treated as hardened, irredeemable delinquents or criminals. Instead, youth should be treated in a way that takes their age, background, identity, and violent or traumatic experiences into account."

& UPCOMING EVENTS

Training Opportunities

Improving Conditions for Youth in Confinement

On September 4, 2013, the National Center for Youth in Custody will present "**Putting It All Together: How Juvenile Facilities Can Create and Sustain Improved Conditions for Youth**" to discuss methods for providing consistently safe, secure, humane, and therapeutic environments for confined youth.

OJJDP Webinar to Explore Survey Data Collection

In collaboration with the National Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center, OJJDP's National Training and Technical Assistance Center will host "Demystifying Survey Data Collection," a 90-minute Webinar focusing on the process of survey data collection. Methods of electronic data entry, tabulation and reporting, and paper-and-pencil surveys will be discussed, as well as how to develop a participant survey, format data for efficient use, and use descriptive statistics to summarize results. [Register](#) to participate in the September 5, 2013, Webinar.

Contact Us

Send questions or feedback about the newsletter to NFYVP@dsgonline.com, or [subscribe](#).

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