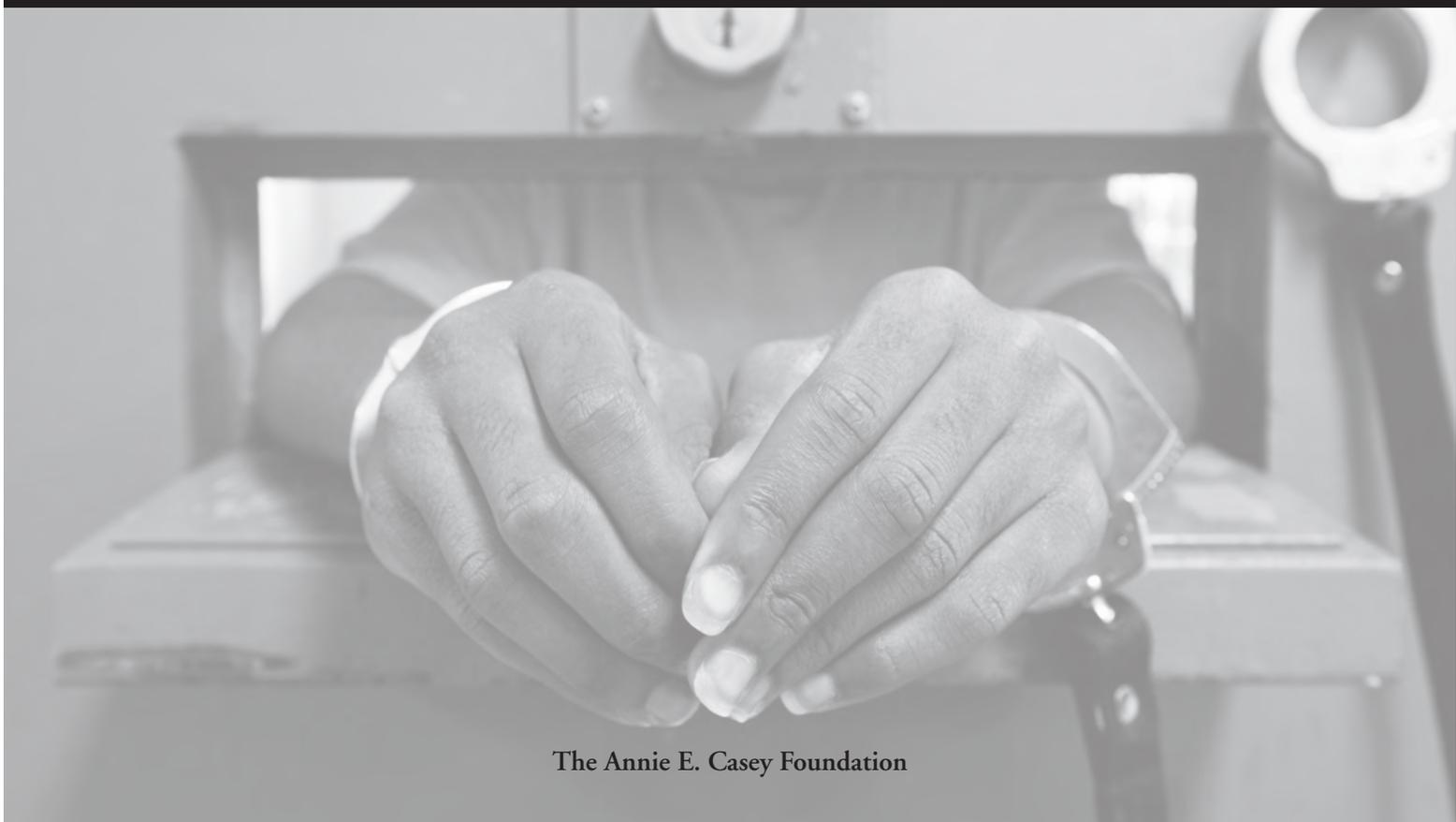




The Missouri Model

Reinventing the Practice of Rehabilitating Youthful Offenders
Summary Report



The Annie E. Casey Foundation

About the Author: Richard A. Mendel is an independent writer and researcher specializing in poverty-related issues in youth, employment, and community economic development. He has written extensively about youth crime prevention and juvenile justice issues, including three reports for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, three nationally disseminated reports published by the American Youth Policy Forum, and several articles for the popular press.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

This is a summary of "The Missouri Model: Reinventing the Practice of Rehabilitating Youthful Offenders." For more information and to download copies of the summary and full report, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

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a sea change

is on the horizon in juvenile corrections. For more than a century, the predominant model for the treatment, punishment, and rehabilitation of serious youthful offenders has been confinement in a large, congregate-care correctional facility. In most states, these institutions still house the bulk of all incarcerated youth and still consume the lion's share of taxpayer spending on juvenile justice.

Unfortunately, the record of large juvenile corrections facilities is dismal. Though many youth confined in these training schools are not serious or chronic offenders, recidivism rates are uniformly high. Violence and abuse inside the facilities are alarmingly commonplace. The costs of correctional incarceration vastly exceed those of other approaches to delinquency treatment with equal or better outcomes, and the evidence shows that incarceration in juvenile facilities has serious and lifelong negative impacts on confined youth.

According to Barry Feld, a leading juvenile justice scholar at the University of Minnesota, "Evaluation research indicates that incarcerating young offenders in large, congregate-care juvenile institutions does not effectively rehabilitate and may actually harm them." In fact, writes Feld, "A century of experience with training schools and youth prisons demonstrates that they constitute the one extensively evaluated and clearly ineffective method to treat delinquents."

Thankfully, the winds of change are beginning to blow in juvenile corrections. A new wave of reform is gathering force, dual-powered by a growing recognition that the conventional practices aren't getting the job done, and by the accumulating evidence that better results are available through a fundamentally different approach.

Actually there are two fundamentally different approaches. One is to substantially reduce the population confined in juvenile correctional institutions by screening out youth who pose minimal dangers to public safety—placing them instead into cost-effective, research- and community-based rehabilitation and youth development programs. In recent years, a number of states (including Alabama, California, Louisiana, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas, plus the District of Columbia) and localities (including Chicago, Detroit, Albuquerque, and Santa Cruz) have systematically reduced their confined youth populations.

The second approach, devised by the State of Missouri's juvenile corrections agency, the Division of Youth Services (DYS), aims at the small minority of youth offenders who must be removed from the community to protect public safety. Departing sharply from the age-old training school model, Missouri has eschewed large, prisonlike correctional institutions in favor of smaller, regionally dispersed facilities.

And instead of standard-fare correctional supervision, Missouri offers a demanding, carefully crafted, multi-layered treatment experience designed to challenge troubled teens and to help them make lasting behavioral changes and prepare for successful transitions back to the community.

Growing Interest and Impressive Results



In recent years, Missouri's approach has been gaining widespread interest. In 2001, the American Youth Policy Center identified Missouri as a "guiding light" for reform in juvenile justice. The Annie E. Casey Foundation profiled the model in its magazine in 2003. In 2007, the *New York Times* ran an editorial labeling Missouri's approach "the right model for juvenile justice," National Public Radio aired an in-depth feature on Missouri's juvenile corrections system, and the Associated Press ran a lengthy article highlighting Missouri's youth corrections success on its national newswire. In September 2008, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government named the Missouri Division of Youth Services winner of its prestigious "Innovations in American Government" award in children and family system reform. Finally, in late 2009, ABC television aired an hour-long edition of its news magazine, *Primetime*, devoted entirely to the Missouri youth corrections model.

Since 2001, hundreds of public officials representing 30 states have visited Missouri to tour its youth corrections and learn first-hand about its juvenile treatment model.

Given Missouri's encouraging results across a host of juvenile justice outcomes, the attention and accolades are well earned.

Recidivism. Measured against states that calculate recidivism in similar ways, Missouri's outcomes are far better.

In Arizona, Indiana, and Maryland, the percentage of youth sentenced to adult prison within three years of release from a juvenile facility are 23.4 percent, 20.8 percent, and 26 percent, respectively. By contrast, just 8.5 percent of youth discharged from DYS custody in 2005 were sentenced to either prison or a 120-day adult correctional program within three years of release.

In Florida, 28 percent of youth released from residential confinement in 2003–2004 were either recommitted to juvenile custody for a new offense or sentenced to adult prison or probation within one year of release. Among DYS youth released in 2005, the comparable rate was just 17.1 percent.

The New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission released a recidivism study in 2007 showing that 36.7 percent of youth released from the state's juvenile correctional facilities in 2004 were either re-incarcerated in juvenile facilities for a new offense or sentenced to adult prison within two years. The comparable rate for Missouri youth released in 2005 was 14.5 percent.

Missouri's juvenile recidivism results are exceptionally strong compared with states like Texas and Arizona that re-incarcerate

large numbers of youth for violating probation and parole rules. In those states, 43 percent (TX) and 52 percent (AZ) of youth are re-incarcerated in adult or juvenile correctional facilities within three years for a new offense or rule violation. In Missouri, the rate is 24 percent.

Safety. Compared with the 97 facilities participating in the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators' Performance-based Standards (PbS) project, assaults against youth are four-and-a-half times as common per capita in participating PbS facilities as in Missouri facilities, and assaults on staff are more than 13 times as common. Meanwhile, PbS facilities use mechanical restraints 17 times as often as DYS, and they use isolation more than 200 times as often.¹ Also, not a single youth in DYS custody has committed suicide in the more than 25 years since the agency closed its trainings schools.

Educational progress. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency has estimated that, on average, just 25 percent of confined juvenile offenders nationwide make one year of academic progress for every year in custody. In Missouri, three-fourths advance at least as fast as a typical student in public school. DYS has also achieved excellent success in helping participants earn a GED or high school diploma. In 2008, 278 DYS residents passed the GED exam, and 36 completed all required credits and earned high school diplomas—meaning that one-fourth of all youth exiting a DYS facility after their 16th birthdays completed their secondary education.

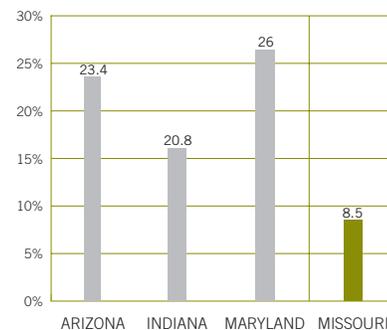
Positive transitions to community. In most states, a high percentage of youth remain

disconnected from school and work following release. Bucking this trend, DYS employs a comprehensive case management system and provides intensive aftercare support to facilitate school enrollment and post-release success of formerly confined youth. In 2008, 85.3 percent of youth exiting DYS were productively engaged in school and/or employment at the time of discharge.

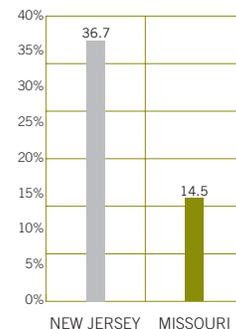
Cost. Given all of these strong results, one of the most impressive features of Missouri's approach to youth corrections is its relatively low cost to taxpayers. Including fringe benefits and other costs not reflected in the official DYS budget, total youth corrections spending in Missouri is about \$87 million. Equivalent to \$155 for each young person of juvenile age (10 to 16 for Missouri), this figure represents a cost to taxpayers that is lower than or comparable to the juvenile corrections systems in most states—and substantially less than some.

Ultimately, the greatest source of savings generated by the Division of Youth Services derives from the success of program graduates in avoiding future crimes. Criminologists estimate that steering just one high-risk delinquent teen away from a life of crime saves society \$3 million to \$6 million in reduced victim costs and criminal justice expenses, plus increased wages and tax payments over the young person's lifetime. Missouri's current director of adult corrections, George Lombardi, credits DYS with saving the state millions of dollars by reducing the recidivism of juvenile offenders into adult prisons.

SENTENCED TO ADULT PRISON WITHIN THREE YEARS OF RELEASE



RE-INCARCERATION WITHIN TWO YEARS OF RELEASE



¹ Figures for both PbS and DYS facilities are based on data self-reported by facility staff and cannot be verified independently.

Core Characteristics



Humane



Harsh

When you ask leaders of the Missouri Division of Youth Services about the keys to the agency's success, they invariably speak first of values and beliefs—and about their agency-wide commitment to helping delinquent youth make deep and lasting changes that enable them to avoid negative (criminal, anti-social, self-destructive) behaviors and to begin on a pathway to success.

In pursuing this purpose, however, DYS has built a unique therapeutic treatment system epitomized by six core characteristics.

one: Missouri places youth who require confinement into smaller facilities located near the youths' homes and families, rather than incarcerating them in large, far-away, prisonlike training schools.

Whereas most youth confined in state juvenile correctional facilities nationwide are housed in institutions with more than 150 beds, the largest of Missouri's 32 residential youth corrections programs has only 50 beds. Each of the seven secure care facilities serves 36 youth or fewer.

DYS has divided the state into five regions, each of which offers a four-level continuum of programs, including: non-residential *community care* for the least serious offenders, many of whom are placed into one of Missouri's 10 "day treatment" centers; *group homes*, which house 10 to 12 less-serious youth offenders at a time; *moderate security facilities*, many of them situated on state parks, which typically house 20 to 50 youth

at a time; and *secure care facilities* for the most serious offenders.

Regardless of the level of care, DYS facilities are designed and furnished in a distinctly non-correctional style. At every level, youth sleep not in cold concrete cells but in carpeted, warmly appointed dorm rooms. Youth are permitted to dress in their own clothes, not correctional uniforms. Little security hardware of any type is visible in DYS facilities. Instead, facility walls are adorned with hand-made posters and colorful bulletin boards displaying residents' writings and art work.

two: Missouri places youth into closely supervised small groups and applies a rigorous group treatment process offering extensive and ongoing individual attention, rather than isolating confined youth in individual cells or leaving them to fend for themselves among their peers.

In every DYS residential facility, young people spend virtually every minute, night and day, with their treatment team. The teams, which typically number 10 to 12 youth, sleep in the same dorm room, eat together, study together, exercise together, and attend daily treatment sessions together—always under the watchful supervision of DYS youth specialists.

The small groups serve as the crucible in which the DYS treatment process attains focus and intensity. Youth remain under the watchful eyes of not only staff, but also their peers, with no opportunity to hide or withdraw. Rather than facing isolation or punishment for engaging in disruptive, disrespectful, or destructive behavior, youth are called upon to explain their thoughts and

feelings, explore how the current misbehavior relates to the lawbreaking that resulted in their incarceration, and reflect on how their actions impact others.

Despite its avid adherence to a group treatment approach, DYS employs many techniques to individualize the treatment process for each young person:

- *Beginning the very first day of their commitment, DYS assigns a single staff person—known as a service coordinator—to oversee his or her case before, during, and after placement in a DYS facility.*
- *In over 80 percent of cases, judges committing a youth to DYS custody apply an indeterminate sentence that grants DYS the right to adjust the length of confinement based on the youth's progress in treatment and readiness to return safely to community life.*
- *DYS regions employ a level system to track progress and determine each young person's readiness for release.*
- *At every residential DYS facility, each group convenes daily for a group treatment session where youth talk about their personal histories, their future goals, and the roots of their delinquent behavior.*
- *Every youth in a DYS facility is guided and supervised by a staff mentor—often referred to as a “one-on-one”—throughout his or her time in the facility.*

three: Missouri places heavy emphasis on keeping youth safe not from only physical aggression but also from ridicule and emotional abuse; and it does so through constant staff supervision and positive peer relationships, rather than through

Steering just one high-risk delinquent teen away from a life of crime saves society \$3 million to \$6 million in reduced victim costs and criminal justice expenses, plus increased wages and tax payments over the young person's lifetime.

coercive techniques that are commonplace in most youth corrections systems.

Unlike many states, Missouri does not allow the use of pepper spray, nor does it permit demeaning or potentially dangerous techniques such as hog-ties, face-down restraints, or electrical shocks, which have been widely reported in other jurisdictions. Mechanical restraints such as handcuffs and shackles are permitted only in rare emergencies. Isolation is rarely used. In fact, only six of the 32 DYS facilities even have an isolation cell.

Instead of coercive correctional techniques, DYS maintains safety through intensive around-the-clock supervision by highly motivated, highly trained staff constantly interacting with youth to create an environment of trust and respect.

four: Missouri helps confined youth develop academic, pre-vocational, and communications skills that improve their ability to succeed following release—along with crucial insights into the roots of their delinquent behavior and new abilities to acknowledge and solve personal problems.

Fostering self-awareness and communications skills. Through the DYS treatment process, young people demonstrate striking improvement in their self-awareness and their confidence and competence as communicators. DYS staff constantly solicit young people's thoughts and treat their ideas and feelings respectfully. When young people misbehave, DYS staff don't mete out punishments but instead require youth to explain their actions and consider their impact on others, and they encourage other youth to voice their opinions and provide support.

Pursuing academic progress. DYS takes an unconventional approach to education by teaching youth together in their treatment groups regardless of aptitude and prior academic achievement. While this format limits the amount of time the students spend on lessons geared specifically to their academic level, keeping the group together allows a conducive atmosphere for learning to pervade. Also, with a certified teacher plus another youth specialist working with each class of just 10 to 12 students, opportunities for individualized attention are plentiful.

Providing opportunities for hands-on learning. In addition to classroom learning, DYS provides plentiful opportunities for youth to apply their skills in real-world contexts. Through a state-funded employment project, DYS provides actual work experience for more than 900 youth per year. In addition, DYS youth participate regularly in community service projects at homeless shelters, senior centers, hospitals, and other charitable organizations.

five: Missouri reaches out to family members and involves them both as partners in the treatment process and as allies in planning for success in the aftercare transition, rather than keeping families at a distance and treating them as the source of delinquent youths' problems.

Immediate outreach and ongoing consultation. As soon as any young person is placed in state custody, the DYS service coordinator meets with parents. DYS facility staff and service coordinators actively encourage family members to attend visiting hours—sometimes offering transportation assistance when lack of a car or accessible public transportation makes visiting difficult.

The success of the DYS approach depends on helping troubled and chronically delinquent young people make deep and lasting changes in how they behave, think, view themselves, and foresee their futures.

Family therapy. According to DYS, 25 to 30 percent of DYS youth participate in family therapy—often toward the end of a residential commitment—after the young person has made substantial progress in treatment. Therapy focuses on helping parents and youth jointly change negative family dynamics and create an alliance to support the youth’s continued success.

Partnership in release planning and aftercare. DYS service coordinators involve parents extensively in planning for every young person’s release and then check in regularly with parents and family members in the crucial reentry period following release.

six: DYS provides considerable support and supervision for youth transitioning home from a correctional placement—including intensive aftercare planning prior to release, and close monitoring and mentoring in the first crucial weeks following release.

Pre-release planning. Before any young person leaves a DYS facility, the youth’s service coordinator works with the young person and his/her family members, plus staff members

from the youth’s treatment team, to develop plans for reenrolling in school and to identify employment opportunities and/or extracurricular activities. Also, youth and parents agree to curfews and other new ground rules for the youth’s behavior in the home. Prior to release, most youth return home for one or more short-term furloughs to prepare for reentry and address any potential problems in advance.

Continuing custody. Following release from a DYS facility, most youth remain under DYS supervision on aftercare status, typically for four to six months. While on aftercare, DYS retains full custody of the youth, including the authority to return the young person to residential confinement if he or she experiences problems or shows signs of falling into anti-social and delinquent behavior patterns.

Monitoring and mentoring in the community. While on aftercare, youth have regular meetings and phone calls with their service coordinators. Many are also assigned a “community-based mentor,” who serves as a role model and confidante for the youth, and who provides an extra point of contact for DYS to monitor how well the young person is faring in the community.

Underlying Values, Beliefs, and Treatment Philosophy



As important as any of the specific techniques and practices employed by the Missouri Division of Youth Services—or perhaps more important—are the values and beliefs that underlie them.

The three most important DYS beliefs are: (1) that all people—including delinquent youth—desire to do well and succeed; (2) that with the right kinds of help, all youth can (and most will) make lasting behavioral changes and succeed; and (3) that the mission of youth corrections must be to provide the right kinds of help, consistent with public safety, so that young people make needed changes and move on to successful adult lives.

Beliefs About Youth

Every young person wants to succeed—and can succeed. No matter how serious their past crimes, and no matter how destructive their current attitudes and behaviors, all youth hunger for approval, acceptance, and achievement.

Change can only result from internal choices made by the young people themselves. Delinquent youth can't be “scared straight”; they cannot be reformed through a military-style boot camp; and few will be deterred from

crime by fear of punishment. Rather, change happens through a process that helps them to adopt more positive behaviors, seek out more positive peers, and embrace more positive goals.

Relationships are critical to overcoming resistance and fostering positive change. Youth respond best and overcome resistance most readily when they know that staff members care about them and expect them to succeed. Young people also benefit enormously both from helping and being helped by other youth in the treatment group.

Youth are more likely to succeed in a safe, nurturing, and non-blaming environment. It is critical that youth be listened to and guided by trusted adults, encouraged to try out new behaviors, and treated with patience, acceptance, and respect.

Every young person is unique. Each DYS youth has fallen into delinquent behaviors in response to his or her own individual circumstances, and each will make the decisions to change and grow—or not—for his or her own personal reasons.

Many youth lapse into delinquency as a coping mechanism in response to earlier abuse, neglect, or trauma. These underlying difficulties must be acknowledged and addressed before change is likely to occur.

Delinquent youth typically suffer from a lack of emotional maturity. They have an absence of insight into their own behavior patterns; an inability to distinguish between feelings and facts, perception and reality; along with an underdeveloped capacity to communicate their feelings clearly and express disagreement or anger responsibly.

All behavior, no matter how maladaptive or destructive, has an underlying emotional purpose. Therefore, the emotions expressed by young people during treatment should not be judged, lest youth withhold their feelings and lose out on crucial opportunities for personal growth.

Most youth entering custody have very low confidence in their ability to succeed as students, or adults, and lack exposure to mentors or positive role models. Enabling youth to taste success in the classroom and to develop trusting relationships with DYS staff (and other caring adults) can provide an invaluable impetus for them to embrace healthy attitudes and adopt a law-abiding lifestyle.

Parents and other family members remain the most crucial people in young people's lives—and the keys to their long-term success. Families retain enormous influence over youth, for good or ill. Rebuilding family relationships is a powerful motivator for virtually every young person who enters a DYS facility.

Beliefs About the Change Process

The therapeutic process leading to sustained behavioral change typically involves five core stages:

Orientation. Young people enter this safe and therapeutic environment and become acclimated to the routines and expectations

of life in a DYS facility, where the aggressive or belligerent behaviors many have relied upon habitually for self-defense and stature are neither required nor rewarded.

Personal growth and self-discovery. During their stays in DYS facilities, youth are frequently asked to think and talk about their feelings and to discuss their behaviors. Gradually, youth gain insights into their own thought processes and behavior patterns; identify the emotional triggers that typically lead them to act out and lose emotional control; examine how current behaviors are connected to past experiences and the dynamics in their own families; and develop the capacity to express their emotions clearly, calmly, and respectfully—even negative emotions like anger and fear.

Integration and mastery. Youth begin applying their new self-knowledge and learning to behave consistently as mature, responsible, and focused-on-the-future young adults. In this phase, youth learn to avoid emotional outbursts and aggressive or self-destructive behavior by setting personal boundaries and avoiding situations that provoke these reactions; and (often through family therapy) they begin to identify, discuss, and resolve underlying family tensions and devise strategies in advance to address family problems that might arise when they return home.

Goal-setting. Youth begin talking with service coordinators, facility staff, parents, and others to create a positive and realistic plan for their futures—where they will continue their education, what career they might want to pursue, where they will look for short-term employment, and how they will avoid negative peers and dangerous temptations that might lead them back into custody.

Several states measure recidivism in similar (if not identical) ways to Missouri, and in every case Missouri's outcomes appear far better.

Transition. As they prepare for release, youth develop detailed “self-care” plans for their return home, begin reconnecting with their families (or other guardians), and make a series of home visits in preparation for their final release. Once home in the community on aftercare, youth receive ongoing support from their service coordinator (and in many cases a community-based mentor as well).

Beliefs About Facilities and Their Environments

Missouri designs the treatment environment to normalize the experience for youth, to the extent possible, based on its belief that the less they treat a young person like a criminal, the less likely he or she will be to feel and behave like a criminal. In addition, DYS believes that its facilities should possess the following characteristics:

The focus on treatment should permeate all aspects of the facility—and at all times.

Further, Missouri believes that all staff—not just youth specialists and administrators, but also cooks, groundskeepers, secretaries—are treatment staff. All must understand and buy in to the agency’s rehabilitative mission, and in their interactions with youth they must demonstrate the same tone of respectfulness and high expectations.

The staff must be diverse in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity. They should be selected in part to reflect the youth they serve, and to understand youths’ cultural backgrounds.

Facilities should be connected to the outside community. This creates opportunities for youth during and after confinement, and to help youth develop a sense of themselves as

contributors to the larger society. Every DYS facility sustains a community liaison council of local leaders who participate in facility activities and help develop opportunities for the young people. Also, each DYS facility hosts frequent tours—led by the young people themselves—out of which service projects, job opportunities, and other youth opportunities often emerge.

Facilities should be kept clean and orderly at all times. Youth themselves do most of the work in order to communicate to youth that they are responsible for their own environment.

In addition to these specific characteristics—indeed more important than any specific trait—DYS believes that its facilities must revere and radiate an atmosphere of respectfulness. Perhaps the greatest need among troubled and delinquent teens—and the biggest key to change and success—is to discover their own sense of dignity and self-respect.

Therefore, Missouri’s approach is always dignifying and never degrading; always respectful and never “because I told you so” or “because you’re bad.” DYS staff are trained and encouraged to treat youth (and their families) with respect at all times, to intervene whenever they sense any young person acting disrespectfully, and to teach youth that the more respect they show others, the more they will reap for themselves.

Organizational Essentials

The final set of core beliefs at DYS relates to the organizational characteristics necessary for the agency to deliver treatment effectively and—most important—to sustain its sense of purpose year-in and year-out and continue achieving strong results for youth, citizens, and taxpayers.

In its work, DYS is guided by a cautionary belief that sustaining success requires ongoing vigilance to protect against what the agency terms “drift”—the gravitational pull toward more punitive approaches, and the ever-present distractions and disruptions that can cloud the agency’s focus on public safety and the well-being of troubled young people. Another core belief is that beliefs alone are not enough: the organization must also develop and adhere to corresponding policies, practices, and supervisory structures to ensure that its everyday actions align with its beliefs and support its mission.

In many ways, the Missouri approach to juvenile corrections requires swimming against the current. Missouri’s methods challenge conventional wisdom and tough-on-crime political orthodoxy. They upset bureaucratic norms, and they demand constant creativity, commitment, and compassion from staff.

To succeed and continue succeeding in this against-the-tide challenge, DYS has tried to adopt the characteristics of a high-performance organization:



Empowering



Warehousing

For the well-being of troubled youth, for the safety of citizens, for the fiscal health of states, the Missouri model for youth corrections offers substantial advantages over the training school approaches still pervasive throughout most of the nation.

Mission focused. To keep the agency mission focused, DYS hires entry-level workers only after determining that they are personally committed and temperamentally suited to helping youth succeed, and it provides intensive and ongoing training to root them in the DYS treatment philosophy. Also, virtually all of the top administrators at DYS have experience working directly with youth within the DYS system and deep appreciation for the DYS treatment model.

Highly motivated. In addition to hiring staff based on workers' affinity for the DYS treatment mission and providing extensive and ongoing training, DYS offers plentiful career advancement opportunities for the most capable members of its staff. These advancement opportunities allow DYS to retain many of its most motivated workers for many years, despite a pay scale that is lower than those of youth corrections agencies in many other states.

Integrated. To operationalize its belief that treatment is a 24/7 activity, DYS has fully integrated its education and treatment activities by keeping treatment groups together during class time and placing a youth specialist in the classroom. Likewise, family therapy and any individual therapy offered to DYS youth are designed to support the group treatment process, rather than operating at cross purposes or on a separate track.

Decentralized. Fewer than 25 of the more than 1,400 employees on the DYS payroll statewide are based in the division's central office. More than 70 work in the state's five regional offices. The regional administrators (and individual facility managers) are given considerable latitude to adapt the Missouri treatment model to local conditions and to experiment with new practices—so long as all strategies are consistent with core DYS values and beliefs.

Dedicated to continuous improvement.

DYS encourages workers at all levels to identify gaps and opportunities, engage in creative problem-solving, and explore new approaches to improve services. Whenever problems or challenges appear, or new opportunities arise, DYS responds by creating staff teams to look into issues, diagnose problems or weaknesses, and identify new opportunities to strengthen programming. Recent improvements include: more flexible visiting hours; transportation assistance to help more parents participate in family therapy; extensive training to boost group leaders' skills in facilitating treatment group sessions; and a new agency-wide performance measure to track the percentage of youth who are enrolled in school or employed when they exit DYS custody.

Engaged in the community. Every DYS facility conducts frequent tours, led by youth, to familiarize community leaders with its mission and programs. All DYS facilities also maintain a community liaison council to help identify community partners and recruit volunteers to host or participate in constructive activities with DYS youth.

Adept at cultivating support from key constituencies. DYS has consistently attracted strong support from top leaders in both political parties, many of whom served on the division's active state advisory board. DYS also brings youth to testify before the state legislature, and to visit Missouri's governor and other state leaders. The state advisory board has proved invaluable on many occasions, shielding DYS from proposed budget cuts or other proposals that might undercut its treatment programs.

Replicating the Model



Utilizing the approach detailed in this report, Missouri is achieving noteworthy outcomes—results counted in large numbers of lives rescued, tax dollars saved, and crimes averted. For leaders in other states whose youth corrections systems are less impressive, the promise of the Missouri approach merits serious consideration.

For any state interested in replicating the Missouri approach—whole or in part—the first essential step must be to embrace the mission of helping delinquent youth make meaningful and lasting behavioral changes and make it the agency’s central focus. States seeking to adopt the Missouri model must populate their youth correction agencies with leaders who believe in this ideal and expect that all or most youth can and will succeed once changes are implemented. States must also cultivate support for this unconventional mission from key stakeholders (governors’ offices, legislators, judges) who have the power to support or stymie the changes necessary to adopt a Missouri-style approach.

In addition, states that are serious about embracing the Missouri approach will need early on to:

- adopt a group-focused treatment process that keeps youth and staff together in small groups throughout the treatment process;
- reject coercive methods for maintaining safety—no hardware, limited use

of isolation—and rely instead upon a relationships-based approach enforced through 24/7 staff supervision;

- redefine job descriptions and conduct intensive retraining so that all facility staff embrace a treatment role;
- integrate education, therapy, and all other program elements into a unified treatment process;
- implement an intensive and individualized case management system that assigns every young person to a single case manager who will track his or her progress and advocate for his or her needs throughout the period of commitment; and
- consider the possibility of closing training schools and replacing them with a network of small, regionally dispersed treatment facilities.

For the well-being of troubled youth, for the safety of citizens and communities, for the fiscal health of states and the bank accounts of taxpayers, the Missouri approach to youth corrections offers important benefits over the training school models still pervasive in most states. The need for Missouri-style change is urgent. The time to start is now.

For More Information

To learn more and to download copies of this summary and the full report, visit www.aecf.org.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
410.547.6600
410.547.6624 fax
www.aecf.org