Advancing Competency Development:
A White Paper for Pennsylvania

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For additional information concerning the material in this report, contact:

Patricia Torbet
NCJJ
3700 South Water Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203
412-227-6950
torbet@ncjj.org

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Patricia Torbet
Douglas Thomas

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Why do we have a *juvenile* justice system in Pennsylvania? What distinctive purpose is this separate system intended to serve? The answer lies in the "Purpose Clause" of Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act, 42 Pa.C.S. Section 6301, as significantly amended in 1995. That is where the legislature spelled out—at least in broad language—the basic goals of the system, the things we should all be trying to achieve in our work with delinquents. "Consistent with the protection of the public interest," the clause states, the purposes of Pennsylvania's delinquency laws are:

> *[T]o provide for children committing delinquent acts programs of supervision, care and rehabilitation which provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community.*

This White Paper explores the "development of competencies" part of that statement— perhaps the least understood of Pennsylvania's three juvenile justice goals. It argues a specific position: what competency development means, why it's important, how it should be done. It's the product of a great deal of thought and discussion on the part of the state advisory group, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee, and a focus group of state and local practitioners, who met periodically over the course of two years to define and identify principles and research-supported practices and outcomes for competency development that conform to the Juvenile Act's purpose. Although decision makers can use it to begin making changes in policy and practice, it's not intended to be the last word on this vital issue. In many ways, we hope it's the *first* word, the start of an extended discussion within the field. Because whatever competency development is, wherever it fits in with competing goals, however it is approached and measured, it lies very close to the heart of juvenile justice. It's the *helping* part, and also the hopeful part—the part that seeks to tap the strengths of young people, their immense capacity for change and growth, in order to achieve transformations.

Competency Development Defined

Webster's defines a competent individual as one "having requisite or adequate ability or qualities" and competence as "a sufficiency of means for the necessities and conveniences of life." In balanced and restorative justice parlance, competency is the capacity to do something well that others value.[1]

Focus group participants examined competency development from a variety of perspectives—positive youth development, delinquency prevention, and balanced and restorative justice. They also examined research on the most effective ways of reducing recidivism in order to define what competency development means in Pennsylvania.

From a developmental perspective, all young people need to have consistent and age-appropriate services, supports and opportunities so that they can acquire a broad range of assets associated with positive development and meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood.[2] Positive youth development programs offer a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences—mentoring, community service, leadership development, peer-centered activities, and long-term follow-up and supports—intended to help young people become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.[3] Youth development principles and strategies have been successfully applied to competency development programs for delinquent youth.[4]

From a delinquency prevention standpoint, at-risk youth need to have clear, positive standards for behavior and opportunities to form pro-social bonds and attachments.[5] Similarly, studies that examine why some individuals bounce back from adversity and experience life success indicate that most at-risk young people grow up normally because of the presence of one or more caring adults in their lives.[6] Successful prevention programs attempt to increase protective factors—those positive traits, beliefs, relationships and conditions in juveniles' lives that help them overcome adversity.

Research tells us that most offenders outgrow their offending behaviors because they acquire skills, get a job, develop close, caring personal relationships, and form attachments and ties to pro-social groups and institutions.[7] The most effective interventions for reducing recidivism actively engage offenders in structured and specific

skill-training approaches and provide opportunities for them to practice and demonstrate new skills.[8] From a balanced and restorative justice perspective, the best opportunities are ones that engage offenders with pro-social young people and adults in experiential, productive activities, such as work or community service.[9] Helping offenders apply their strengths or resources toward solutions to troublesome behavior is a strength-based approach that also builds competencies.

After examining the research, we settled on the following definition—**competency development is the *process* by which juvenile offenders acquire the knowledge and skills that make it possible for them to become productive, connected, and law abiding members of their communities and selected five core competency domains**—areas in which one could reasonably expect young people in trouble with the law to build and demonstrate competencies depending on their age and stage of development. These domains are:

1. **Pro-Social Skills**
2. **Moral Reasoning Skills**
3. **Academic Skills**
4. **Workforce Development Skills**
5. **Independent Living Skills**

These domains do not represent a complete list of the competency areas or skills that young people need in order to succeed in life or all the things parents might want for their children. But research indicates that these are the competency areas that matter most for success in school, work and life; that strengthening these areas increases resistance to delinquency; and that deficits in these areas put juveniles at risk for continued involvement in the juvenile justice system.

‖ Domains Amplified:

The five core competency domains are discussed individually below; however, they can be consolidated into a "life skills" curriculum that addresses academic, workforce development and social skills or a social skills curriculum that combines training on social and moral reasoning skills.

Pro-Social Skills help adolescents increase their chances of navigating their interactions with others in pro-social ways. This domain includes a set of interaction, problem solving,

and impulse control skills (see table). Research has shown that an effective comprehensive social skills training program arguably has the greatest positive single influence for reducing recidivism.[10] In particular, combined cognitive (social problem solving) and self-control skill training is an approach that has been shown to reduce recidivism in youth with learning, behavioral, attention and emotional disabilities.[11] Goals for this domain include better social interactions, problem solving, and impulse control.

Pro-Social Skills[12]	
Skill	Competencies
Interaction Skills: Discrete observable social behaviors and assertiveness skills	Initiate greetings or interactions; listen well; resist peer pressure; deal with positive and negative feedback; negotiate; accept criticism; effectively disagree and handle conflict
Cognitive Skills: Thinking skills, particularly problem solving skills, that are applicable to a variety of social situations	Recognize, define, and clarify a problem; connect cause and effect; identify solutions; set realistic goals; predict and evaluate consequences; engage in step-by-step planning; anticipate pitfalls in carrying out solutions
Self-Control Skills: Interaction and cognitive skills that help prevent an individual from displaying aversive or antisocial behavior	Delay gratification; display impulse, anger and aggression control; engage in emotional self-awareness, self-talk, and self-monitoring

Moral Reasoning Skills help adolescents recognize thought processes that rationalize negative behaviors and understand how their thinking, values, and choices affect their behavior. This domain refers to a more complex set of concepts than those related to basic pro-social skills, in effect teaching young people principles to live by and guidelines for making good choices.* The goal is making the right decisions for the right reasons.

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* Criminal law is based on the general moral assumption that the existence of any society, no matter how diverse, depends on the shared belief that it cannot tolerate social irresponsibility that hurts another person: such acts are unlawful *and* immoral. In that sense, the juvenile justice system has a responsibility to help delinquent youth (and their families) emotionally and intuitively integrate the difference between right and wrong. Every member agreed that delinquent youth would benefit from instruction on how their thoughts affect their behavior and how their actions affect their quality of life and that of others.

How Does Competency Development Fit with Treatment?

Even though competency development and treatment are not mutually exclusive, competency development is not treatment. Competency development has to do with the acquisition of knowledge and skills in specific areas related to living, learning, and working. Strictly speaking, treatment has to do with the clinical techniques used to address, in specific ways, identifiable medical, biological, or psychological disorders or destructive behaviors that are amenable to being treated, like substance abuse, mental illness, sexual aggression, violence, or serious thinking errors. Treatment services can be provided on an outpatient or inpatient basis, usually depending on the public safety risk offenders pose or the seriousness of their disorder. Whereas many young people involved with the juvenile justice system do not need treatment for specific offending behaviors or disorders, nearly all of them could benefit from competency development activities.

At least initially, treatment is geared to helping offenders get to the point where they can control their behavior. During treatment, they will likely learn some skills that will help them control their disorders or end destructive behaviors. However, youth in treatment should be engaged in purposeful skill training and other competency development activities described in this White Paper because youth do not become "competent" just because they complete a treatment program. In other words, not being "bad" doesn't equal being competent. Under balanced and restorative justice, Pennsylvania measures more than just recidivism.

Academic Skills help adolescents improve their chances of having a successful educational experience. This domain includes a set of study and learning skills and basic reading, writing, and math skills. Although the juvenile justice system is not responsible for fixing the problem of failing students or failing schools, probation officers have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of offenders so that their educational gaps can be addressed. Youth with learning, attention, and behavioral disabilities need academic remediation and can be successful in mainstream classrooms if a variety of accommodations are provided.[13] Goals for this domain include catching up in school and advancing in school to the highest possible level of academic achievement.[14]

Workforce Development Skills and Job Training help older teens improve their chances of being economically self-sufficient after high school. This domain includes a set of workforce development skills for getting a job, keeping a job, and achieving

promotion as well as specific computer and other technological skills or job training programs. Effective workforce development skill training programs that promote economic self-sufficiency are comprehensive, sustained, grounded in principles of youth development, and connected to further education and long-term career opportunities.[15] The goal for this domain is economic self-sufficiency.

Independent Living Skills help older teens, particularly those coming out of placement/ foster care who are unable to return home, improve their chances of living sufficiently on their own. This domain includes a set of skills related to daily living, such as money management and budgeting, career and educational planning, and acquiring financial aid, housing assistance, and medical insurance. The goal for this domain is self-sufficient living.

Tell, Show, Do: Effective Skill Training

The primary activity used to advance competency development is skill training.[16] Effective skill training programs incorporate the following trainer techniques:

▸ **Present the idea:** sell the benefits of using the skill.

▸ **Modeling:** demonstrate/exhibit use of the skill and verbalize own thinking process when arriving at a decision on how to behave.

▸ **Role-play/guided practice:** engage adolescents in active, experiential learning along with time to reflect on their experiences and discuss how the concepts being presented apply to their own lives.

▸ **Corrective feedback:** help trainees identify what they did well in the role-plays and what aspects of their skill production need to be changed or improved.

▸ **Generalization training:** help trainees identify a variety of settings or situations where the skill can be used.

▸ **Coaching:** encourage and remind trainees to use a specific skill in a specific situation, follow-up to see how things went, and re-teach a point or principle as necessary.

- **Reinforcement/Consequences:** hand out positive reinforcement so that pro-social behavior will be repeated in the future. Reinforcers can be tangible (money, material goods, or participation in recreation, sports, cultural activities) or social (attention, encouragement and praise).
- **Recycle learning:** as necessary, model the skill and have youth role-play skill with feedback.

Skill training programs cannot be done off-the-cuff or haphazardly. They should be research-based and developed or adapted for an at-risk or delinquent population. They should employ a curricula/manual/tool designed to improve a specific skill or set of skills and be conducted over several sessions of an hour or so in duration. Finally, skill training programs must be delivered with integrity—competent and qualified staff must be trained to deliver the curriculum and supervised to ensure fidelity to it.

There's More to Competency Development than Skill Training

Although skill training is the primary activity used to advance competency development, there's more to competency development than that. The research is clear. Interventions that do not ultimately build stronger relationships or bonds to pro-social entities and positive roles for offenders in the community are unlikely to have long-term impact.[17] In order to advance competency development, juvenile offenders—whether on probation, in placement, or on aftercare—need:

- Opportunities to practice and demonstrate new skills
- Opportunities to engage in experiential, productive activities
- Opportunities to establish positive relationships with law-abiding adults and peers
- Opportunities to form ties with pro-social community groups and institutions
- Services and supports that advance competency development.

Skill training will not lead to competency or change real life behavior if training is stopped immediately after the youth learns to produce the skill in counseling, classroom, or role-play sessions. This is especially pertinent for youth receiving skill training in institutions.

Youth in placement need opportunities to practice and demonstrate their new skills and participate in productive and valued activities *in* the community.

The challenge for residential service providers is to work with probation to develop a coordinated plan for addressing the competency development goal that includes clear expectations for the youth to demonstrate the skill in real life. Work furlough or community service opportunities, family visitations, and vocational training in the community offer institutionalized youth the opportunity to practice and demonstrate newly learned skills and such opportunities should be incorporated into pre and post-release activities. Teachers, line staff and treatment personnel should all be trained in how to coach and reinforce targeted skills. Likewise, collaboration must extend to parents or caretakers while the youth is in placement so that skills can be sustained during home visits and upon reentry into the community.

Community service (or other service-learning or helping activity) can be one of the best vehicles for providing opportunities to advance competency development. Typically, probation departments have used community service to address the accountability goal— offenders are required to give something meaningful back to the community. But good community service should also engage offenders in productive, hands-on experiences with opportunities to learn or practice skills, strengthen relationships with pro-social adults in the community, and increase bonds to positive groups/institutions. Good community service programs also demonstrate to the community that young offenders are assets who have something to contribute to society rather than liabilities and provide potential for offenders to view themselves as contributors and stewards. For these things to occur, community service must be meaningful to the community and worthwhile for the juvenile.[18]

In addition to learning new skills, offenders also need opportunities to establish positive relationships and form new bonds. Relationships are key to adolescent well-being: parent-child interactions and bonding greatly influence adolescents' choices and attitudes; peer relationships—particularly positive ties among teens—are important; and siblings, teachers, and mentors can provide additional support to young people.[19] Youth should also be encouraged to participate in clubs and other organized positive youth development opportunities where pro-social activities prevail. Finally, some offenders may need services and supports available in the community, such as educational remediation, tutoring, or job training. Other offenders could benefit from family-based services that teach techniques focused on problem solving, communication, limit setting, supervision, and discipline, provided by such programs as Functional Family Therapy and Multi-Systemic Therapy, two "Blueprints" programs.

A Developmental Perspective on Competency Development

Developmental differences must be taken into account when assessing a young person's competency needs or planning competency development activities. A developmental perspective is likely to lead to an adjustment in expectations regarding a 12-year-old's ability to develop competencies in certain areas versus a 17-year-old's. The adolescent development literature clearly links cognitive, social and emotional development to age. Learning a skill requires some level of capacity. The system cannot cause development to happen faster than young people are programmed to develop. More than that, an emphasis on training and skill acquisition alone fails to address the capacities necessary to translate a skill, automotive repair, for example, into real behavior, such as reporting to work on time or managing earnings. Probation officer training in adolescent development and how to determine developmental progress of the young people they work with is essential. Beyond that, skill training programs may require adjustments in approach when delivered to a pre-teen rather than to an older adolescent.

Sources: *Desktop Guide to Good Juvenile Probation Practice* (2002), particularly Chapter 3, Youth and Delinquency. Available online at www.ncjj.org. Steinberg, L., Chung, H.L., and Little, M. (January 2004). Reentry of young offenders from the justice system: A developmental perspective. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 2(1).

Responsibilities/Limits of the Juvenile Justice System

All youth who pass through the juvenile justice system should leave the system better than when they entered it—more capable of being productive, connected and law-abiding members of the community. It's one of the foundational principles of balanced and restorative justice (see sidebar). "Better" means leaving with increased competencies. However, the juvenile justice system should not be the service delivery system responsible for ensuring that *all youth are fully competent*. The juvenile justice system has an important, but limited, place in developing competencies.

Balanced Approach and Restorative Justice Principles

The "balanced attention" mandate in the purpose clause of Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act has its origin in the "balanced approach" model for juvenile probation that was developed in the late 1980s. For the first time, the model sought to reconcile the seemingly incompatible values of community protection, offender accountability, and competency development so that decision makers and practitioners would consider the possible relevance of each of these core values in shaping responses for offenders.

The balanced approach model included developing essential skills under the banner of "competency development" *as an extension and augmentation to* (emphasis added) the more traditional interventions of counseling and psychotherapeutic techniques. The model's developers surmised that adding the elements of competency development—providing opportunities for young offenders to develop and practice living, learning, working skills—would increase the effectiveness of probation in both community protection and accountability and hold the most potential for altering the future behavior of offenders.

Pennsylvania's revised purpose statute also incorporates principles of restorative justice, which give priority to repairing the harm done to crime victims and communities. Offender accountability is defined in terms of assuming

There are compelling reasons why the juvenile justice system should have limited aspirations regarding competency development. *First*, its time is limited. It should do what it can in the time available, but such efforts will rarely be comprehensive. *Second*, it shouldn't require more involvement than necessary to meet system goals. There are certain objectives an offender needs to achieve in order to accomplish system goals, but they are limited and realistic. *Third*, it can't do it alone. Some youth come to the system with a whole host of skill deficits or weak pro-social bonds. One of the major goals of the juvenile justice system—which is an involuntary system—is to create opportunities for youth to succeed in the voluntary systems of education and vocational training, not to

responsibility and taking action to make amends rather than the more traditional notion of "taking" the punishment or passively "doing" the time. The juvenile justice system helps offenders understand the impact of their behavior—the harms they have done—and take steps to put things right as much as possible. Fulfillment of community service and/or restitution obligations and participation in victim awareness classes and other restorative processes are the primary activities juvenile offenders engage in pursuant to this goal.

Adopting principles from both philosophies and applying them to programs of supervision and treatment gave the Commonwealth its balanced and restorative justice model. Pennsylvania has undertaken a purposeful effort to align its broad mission with clear goals, specific practices, and realistic outcomes. The product of that effort will be a juvenile justice system that is mission-driven, performance-based, and outcome-focused.

Sources: Maloney, D., Armstrong, T., and Romig, D. (1988). The balanced approach. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 39(3). *Juvenile Justice in Pennsylvania*. (2005). Harrisburg, PA: Juvenile Court Judges' Commission.

References: For an excellent primer on restorative justice, please see Zehr, H. (2002). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books. Also see Bazemore, G., and Umbreit, M. (August 1997). *Balanced and Restorative Justice for Juveniles: A Framework for Juvenile Justice in the 21st Century*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Balanced and Restorative Justice Project. The National District Attorneys Association has also endorsed balanced and restorative justice principles in its *Resource Manual and Policy Positions on Juvenile Crime Issues*, adopted on July 14, 2002. Available online at http://www.ndaa.org/publications/apri/juvenile_justice.html

mention the community institutions and organizations that can provide the range of broader youth development supports, networks, and opportunities. The competency development goal requires linking with those voluntary systems, whether the juvenile is under community-based supervision or in an institution and planning for re-entry. Indeed, juvenile justice policy and practice should not relieve other public systems—or communities for that matter—of fulfilling their responsibilities to youth.

Focus group participants reached consensus regarding the purpose of competency development in Pennsylvania. Simply stated, **the *purpose* of competency**

development is to help juvenile offenders acquire the knowledge and skills that make it possible for them to live productively, connected and lawfully in their communities. The *role* of the juvenile justice system is to facilitate efforts that advance youths' competencies so that offenders are less likely to take part in anti-social, delinquent behaviors and better able to become responsible and productive members of their communities.

Sometimes that means juveniles will learn a useful skill directly from juvenile court involvement. For example, juveniles participating in a Habitat for Humanity work service project may gain some tangible job skills (e.g., punctuality, taking directions) and some useful building skills. They might also become more connected to the community by working side-by-side with a caring adult.

Most of the time, however, the juvenile justice system will serve as a vehicle for identifying competency needs and strengths and a catalyst for acquiring needed skills. For example, a juvenile may have academic skill deficiencies. A juvenile probation officer can recognize those deficiencies, work collaboratively with schools to develop a plan to address them, encourage the juvenile's cooperation and participation, and work with schools and other service providers to address the educational issue.

What is the Juvenile Justice System Accountable For?

Although there is no expectation that the juvenile justice system expend efforts to ensure that all court-involved youth develop skills in every core competency domain, there is an expectation that each case will be assessed across all five domains and where appropriate, efforts made to address specific competency development needs most closely associated with the juvenile's offending behavior and to build on any strengths. Beyond that, the system is accountable for delivering or contracting for services that are likely to achieve the competency development goal. It is hoped that momentum toward competency established while under supervision will continue after juvenile court jurisdiction has ended so that long-term outcomes can be realized.

However, holding the system—and other provider systems—accountable for the hoped-for positive long-term outcomes on a case-by-case basis isn't entirely fair. In business, the bottom line is results measured by profits. When the "business" involves human behavior, the onus for the bottom line—law-abiding behavior—is on the youth. After all, the juvenile justice system can change a young person's thinking but it can't change his or her mind. Ultimately, it comes down to individual responsibility.

Nevertheless, probation departments—and providers for that matter—must be willing to examine the results of their efforts and pledge to make corrections when the outcomes are not as good as expected. Learning is an obligation and the system should always be working on reducing recidivism rates and advancing competency development in order to increase public safety in the long run and make better citizens: productive, connected and law-abiding adults.

New Roles and Responsibilities

Applying a new definition of competency development affects the roles and responsibilities of various participants. Traditionally, a probation officer's role has been directed at "managing" risk/controlling behavior (by carrying out the court's order regarding a specific number of contacts or conditions) and changing behavior (primarily through counseling/casework). Studies of this customary form of probation have not shown consistent evidence of reduced recidivism.[20] Specifically, traditional counseling and casework approaches that are "non-directive" or open ended were generally found to be ineffective.[21] Nevertheless, a good interpersonal relationship between offender and PO is the essence of supervision (see sidebar). If the juvenile fails to buy into that relationship, probation is not likely to succeed. A probation officer who models and reinforces pro-social behavior and attitudes will likely have a positive impact on an offender. In addition, probation officers who direct their advice and counsel toward advancing competency development—acquiring and practicing new skills and making new connections—will increase offenders' chances of learning and mastering the desired behavior.[22]

Good Probation Practices:

Juvenile probation officers play key roles in advancing competency development. They may facilitate a skill-training curriculum with a group of offenders. They may develop good community service projects or oversee them. Or, they can simply ensure that offenders are engaged in these and other competency development activities. However, there are several practices, calculated to achieve the competency development goal, that

juvenile probation departments should be expected to perform.[23] For every delinquent under juvenile court jurisdiction, a juvenile probation officer should:

1. Conduct a structured needs (and strengths) assessment across all five domains for the purpose of identifying the targets of intervention (and strengths to build on).[*] Targeted competency development needs are those most closely associated with the juvenile's offending behavior.

2. Develop a supervision plan based upon assessment results. Plans should clearly state expectations regarding the competency development goal and identify specific activities that each party (juvenile, parent, PO, provider) will engage in pursuant to the goal. Finally, criteria for success or failure, how the youth's progress will be monitored, and consequences for noncompliance should be explained.

3. Coach, encourage and support individual's participation in the selected skill-training curriculum and reinforce learning.

4. Identify services and supports in the community that would facilitate mastery of skills and assist referral.

5. Monitor participation and progress and make adjustments to remediate any off-track performance. Poor performance may indicate learning problems, which can be accommodated or a bad attitude, which can be adjusted.

6. Apply incentives and sanctions to reinforce accountability.

7. Provide opportunities to practice and demonstrate new skills (e.g., community service projects) and make connections with pro-social adults and peers and community groups (e.g., mentoring, clubs, church youth groups).

8. Document intermediate outcomes at case closing.

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 * A standardized needs assessment protocol will allow probation departments to uniformly and consistently gather specific, relevant information and organize and consider it in a logical manner. Such a process should improve the quality of decisions and lend equity/consistency to decision making without eliminating professional discretion. Essential features include a standard format for recording the information and training in how to interpret and use the information to develop supervision plans. Care must be taken to make sure the protocol is sensitive to maturational, gender and cultural differences.

||Roles and Responsibilities of Various Participants:

Although juvenile probation has the central role in carrying out the juvenile court's orders, the juvenile justice system cannot succeed without the involvement and support of others. Since competency development activities can be pursued in any setting and under any court status, others clearly have a role in advancing competency development. In particular, Pennsylvania's vast array of private providers of residential and community-based services has much to offer. In addition, community members, governmental agencies, schools, and service organizations have resources the juvenile justice system relies upon to carry out its mission. The juvenile court judge can serve as a catalyst for increasing partner willingness and capacity to take responsibility for integrating and reintegrating juvenile offenders. Nurturing these partnerships, fashioning collaborative

What Made the Difference to One Young Man

How do you get a young person to listen to what you have to say? Based on the advice and insight of one young man who recently came out of the system quite competent, you need to develop a relationship.

- ▸ Be sincere – show genuine concern about the individual

- ▸ Be respectful - listen attentively, treat them with dignity and sensitivity to cultural influences

- ▸ Be diligent – keep at it, don't give up, be available

Once you've got their attention,

- ▸ Make it relevant: Help them find meaning in the information being presented

- ▸ Make it useful: Help them put it to good use in every day situations

- ▸ Instill hope: Help them understand they have an opportunity to do something positive with their life.

Source: Comments attributed to Dominic Roma, JJPDA youth member, during a panel discussion on competency development, October 28, 2004.

relationships, and sharing information are essential ingredients for ensuring successful local responses to juvenile delinquency.

Since advancing competency development is not the job of one person, various entities share a collective responsibility. Some new roles include:

▸ **Prosecuting and defense attorneys:** advocate for the development of good skill training, community service and other positive youth development programs in the community and recommend offender involvement in them.

▸ **Detention:** when detention is viewed as part of the juvenile justice system process / continuum of services and resources, detention staff can begin to develop relationships and apply a strength-based approach that is focused on recognizing a young person's strengths, potential and ability to become a productive, connected and law abiding member of the community.

▸ **Residential program:** provide good skill development curriculum; develop a relationship-strengthening and community-connectedness focus in order to overcome isolation; find creative, positive and active roles for youth as leaders and mentors for other youth.

▸ **Schools:** provide educational assessment and remediation of court-involved youth, particularly in reading and math; partner with JPOs to encourage good attendance and retention; work to remove barriers to re-enrollment following release from placement.

▸ **Offenders:** become active participants in developing competencies rather than passive recipients of services; viewed as resources rather than liabilities.

▸ **Community (businesses, churches, citizens, community groups):** create and support pro-social community activities in which young people can succeed and provide support to families and positive youth development opportunities.

▸ **Parents or guardians:** actively support development of child's competencies and hold young person accountable; viewed as assets and partners who may need to be motivated to accept their rightful role or learn new parenting techniques that will assist in advancing competency development.

Measuring Competency Development

What the juvenile justice system hopes to accomplish regarding the competency development goal is for delinquent youth to leave the system more capable of being productive, connected and law abiding. In order to know whether the goal has been achieved, results must be measured. Identifying the intended results or a few key outcomes directly related to the competency development goal and selecting relevant measures of performance for each outcome can provide tangible evidence of the degree to which the goal has been achieved.

Outcomes can be measured at two different points in time. "Intermediate" outcomes are measured at the point of service termination or case closing and reflect the direct and immediate effect of service delivery in an individual case. Collecting information on intermediate outcomes at case closing is good practice and an essential part of system accountability. "Long-term" outcomes are measured at some point after case closing, say at 12 or 18 months, and indicate whether the ultimate goals have been achieved.

Collecting information on long-term outcomes is time consuming and beyond the ability of most juvenile probation departments not to mention nearly impossible cross-county or across juvenile and adult court systems. And, given all of the other forces at play in the life of an adolescent, juvenile justice systems should not be held solely accountable for long-term outcomes at the individual level. However, they and others should be responsible for delivering services that are likely to produce the desired long-term outcomes. Collecting intermediate outcomes will make it easier to conduct research designed to produce evidence that some interventions produce positive, long-term outcomes and others need to be modified.

There's a logical connection and progression from mission-driven goals to outcomes that is demonstrated in the illustration on the next page.

Mission Statement
(a clear articulation of purpose and goals)

➥ Goals
(broad statements of what the program is designed to accomplish)
Competency Development Goal:
Juveniles will leave the system more capable of being productive, connected and law abiding

➥ Objectives
(operational versions of the goal)
Competency Development Objective:
Provide offenders with specific skills and opportunities required to be productive, connected and law abiding

➥ Activities / Processes
(specific interventions or actions designed and employed to achieve goal-driven objectives)
Example:
Skill training programs

➥ Outputs
(level of accomplishment)
Example:
Successful completion of social skills training program

➥ Intermediate Outcomes
(results achieved at case closing as a result of activities or processes)
Example:
Productive, connected and law abiding

➥ Long-Term Outcomes
(results at 12 months after case closing)
Example:
Lawful behavior

The best course of action for measuring performance is for probation officers to record information regarding specific outputs and intermediate outcomes at the time a case is closed from juvenile court jurisdiction. (Providers should also be encouraged to collect case-closing information.) Case-level information on outputs and intermediate outcomes is readily available at the time a case is closed and has utility at several levels:

- ▸ **Operational:** in terms of immediate utility, case closing information should be collected by the PO, reviewed by a supervisor and shared with the juvenile, parents, attorneys, victim, and the judge thereby ensuring its accuracy.

- ▸ **Management:** case-level information can be aggregated for a probation officer, a unit, or a program and used in management meetings or to plan resources.

- ▸ **Administrative:** case-level information can be aggregated for the department as a whole and presented to the community as a report card of achievements.

- ▸ **Reporting:** accurate case-level information can be aggregated for statewide reporting of intermediate outcomes.

||The Case Closing Form:

The National Center for Juvenile Justice, with funding from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and in close collaboration with the Chief's Council and the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, has developed a strategy for probation officers to collect case-level information on outputs and intermediate outcomes that in the aggregate measures balanced and restorative justice in Pennsylvania. With some modification to the "case closing" form, it can accommodate the improvements in competency development measures suggested below.

Performance measures are the indicators of the degree to which activities have been completed and outputs and outcomes achieved. Indications of the degree to which competency development activities have been completed and outputs achieved can be collected with revisions to the current "case closing" form:

Assessed Competency Domains	Included in Case Plan?	Failed to Complete	Partially Completed	Successfully Completed
Pro-Social Skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Moral Reasoning Skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Workforce Development Skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Independent Living Skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
Academic Skills	☐	☐	☐	☐

Collecting data on relevant outputs helps administrators understand the findings related to the outcomes. For example, did youth who successfully complete a training program have better outcomes than those who did not? Successful completion (e.g., level of accomplishment or the output) may be measured by:

▸ a subjective assessment by an observer (such as probation officer or trainer) that the juvenile successfully completed a skills training program

▸ a certificate of achievement

▸ scores on pre and post tests that measure knowledge acquisition related to a skills training curriculum

▸ improvements in reading / math grades.

In order to measure more than just completed activities and outputs, probation officers should also capture demonstrable evidence of goal attainment, represented here by a composite intermediate outcome measure of competency. This litmus test, of sorts, for competency development demonstrates the degree to which an offender is leaving the system more competent in terms of being productive, connected and law abiding. In order to know whether a youth has achieved these objectives, empirical (observable) evidence must be collected. Evidence of "competence" would require a youth to score 3 out of 3 on the competency composite described below at the time of case closing.

Competency Development Composite	
Intermediate Outcomes:	Indicators:
Productive	☐ Attending school and passing OR ☐ Attending GED prep/alternative ed program OR ☐ Participating in vocational training OR ☐ Actively seeking employment OR ☐ Employed (Any one qualifies for achievement of that objective)
Connected	☐ Engaged with a mentor OR ☐ Engaged with positive peer group OR ☐ Engaged in club or other organized school or community group or activity) (Any one qualifies for achievement of that objective)
Law-abiding	☐ No new adjudications/adult convictions or pending court cases 3 mos. prior to case closing

By taking the time to document participation in and completion of skill-building activities and record the degree to which an offender is leaving the system more capable of being productive, connected, and law abiding at the time of case closing, juvenile courts and probation departments will be able to report with confidence whether they are achieving the competency development goal.

Next Steps

Clarifying and implementing Pennsylvania's vision for juvenile justice has been a dynamic, evolutionary process. What we do now is different from what we did 10 years ago and will be different from what we do five years in the future. This White Paper is the result of many hours spent re-examining our assumptions, values, and current approaches to delinquency and competency development and what various individual's roles and responsibilities could be. Future White Papers will more fully define the accountability and community protection goals.

Although this White Paper has gone a long way toward defining competency development, it also points out the need for much more work. It certainly points to the need for protocols for needs assessment and how the results can be used to develop goal-directed supervision plans, match offenders to resources, and justify expenditure of resources. We will be working on that. It begs the question, "which skills training programs?" We will compile a compendium of proven and promising skill training curricula as well as other competency development practices. We will be working to improve the case closing form and encourage and support its use in all counties. We will be working on developing an aftercare model that will incorporate the best practice elements described in this paper. We will develop competency development training for judges, attorneys, juvenile probation officers, service providers, and placement staff and figure out how to provide on-site technical assistance for implementing new practices and procedures. Finally, we will continue to get the word out to legislators, funders and communities to let them know where we stand.

Endnotes

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Focus Group Participants

James Johns
Co-Chair
DPW, Bur. of State C&Y Programs

Susan Blackburn
Co-Chair
Ctr. for JJ Training and Research

Seth Bloomquist
CJJT&R

Clyde Caldwell, Jr.
Loysville YDC

Kip Cherry
Adelphoi Village

Joseph Cirulli
Berks Co. Youth Center
JDCAP

Andrew DeAngelo
Lehigh Co. Juvenile Probation

Larry DeMooy
Delaware Co. Juvenile Probation

Thomas Ganser
Lehigh Co. Juvenile Probation

Hon. Donna Gority
Blair County Commissioner

Lois Huling
DPW, Bur. of State C & Y Programs

Kris Johnson
Westmoreland Co. Juvenile Probation

James Keeley
Dept of Education

Margery Miller
Montgomery Co. Juvenile Probation

Edward Robbins
Lycoming Co. Juvenile Probation

Angelo Santore
DPW, Office of Children Youth & Families

Robert Schwartz
Juvenile Law Center

Kenton Scott
Community Member

Richard Steele
Northwestern Academy

Marcy Szumanski
PCCD/OJJDP

Ron Turo, Esq.
Cumberland Co. Public Defender's Office

Cynthia Wess
Cambria Co. Juvenile Probation

Kenneth Wint
Loysville Complex

Todd Whitmer
Facilitator

Patricia Torbet
Douglas Thomas
Valerie Bender
Principal Investigators
National Center for Juvenile Justice

JJDPC Members

Ronald Sharp
Chair
Alternative Rehabilitation Communities, Inc.

James Anderson
Vice Chair
Juvenile Court Judges' Commission

Hon. Fred Anthony
Court of Common Pleas
Erie County

Adeline Beighley
Westmoreland Co. Juvenile Probation

Valerie Bender
National Ctr for Juvenile Justice

Susan Blackburn
CJJT & R

John Bukovac
Vision Quest

Esther Bush
Urban League of Pittsburgh

Hon. Emanuel Cassimatis
Court of Common Pleas
York County

Rachael Coldsmith
Youth Member

John Delaney
Philadelphia District Attorney's Office

Hon. Donna Gority
Blair County Commissioner

Mark Greenberg
The Pennsylvania State University

Hon. Arthur Grim
Court of Common Pleas
Berks County

Phillip Harris
Temple University

James Harron
Cora Services

Leon Haynes
Hosanna House

Corey Kean
Alternative Rehabilitation Communities, Inc.

William Mader
Retired

Lawrence Mason
Retired

Michael McCalpin
Adelphoi Village

Wanda Mial
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Bethany Murtha
Lancaster Co. Juvenile Probation

James Randolph
Philadelphia Dept of Human Services

Members continued from page 25.....

James Rieland
Allegheny County Juvenile Court

Dominic Roma
Youth Member

Robert Schwartz
Juvenile Law Center

Alan Tezak
Northwestern Youth Services

Patricia Torbet
National Center for Juvenile Justice

Stephen White
Doylestown Twp. Police Department

Alexander Wilson
Shuman Juvenile Detention Center

Charles Gray
Ruth Williams
Michael Pennington
PCCD/OJJDP