



Understanding What Makes Justice-Involved Youths Prepared and Ready for Reentry

Kim Godfrey, Executive Director
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The Issue

Research and experience have shown that youths have the best chances for successful reentry (meaning both discontinuing offending behavior and realizing positive life outcomes) when they are both prepared and ready. We also know that looking only at agency records of services provided, activities offered and certifications or credits earned provide “an incomplete account of developmental outcomes because they include little information about youths’ social and emotional assets.”¹ In other words, administrative data alone doesn’t tell us if the efforts have resulted in the youths being prepared and ready– we need to ask them.

Performance-based Standards (PbS),² a national non-profit dedicated to treating all youths as one of our own, has developed the new PbS Youth Reentry Survey to better understand how prepared and ready youths are when they leave juvenile justice facilities and end community supervision. The survey asks them for their perceptions of their preparedness and readiness to return to the community and living independently. Research has made clear that youths’ perceptions matter and that juvenile justice leaders need to expand the efforts to obtain and use youths’ perceptions to improve facility processes.³ The new Youth Reentry Survey compliments programmatic data and with reentry questions soon to be included in the PbS Family Survey, will provide a robust picture of the effectiveness and impact of reentry services and initiatives.

New Youth Reentry Survey

The new PbS Youth Reentry Survey is being launched following a four-year long project developing reentry measurement standards for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The project resulted in a framework of standards and measures grounded in research and practice to assess youths’ preparedness and readiness when they leave residential placement and when their post-placement supervision and/or system involvement ends. The framework is grounded by guiding principles of fairness, accountability, family and collaboration and is organized by reentry domains key to preventing reoffending and achieving positive youth outcomes such as education and employment, well-being and health and connection to community as well as domains for best reentry practices such as assessment, case management and quality improvement and assurance. Each domain includes a list of measures that provide timely, short-term indicators of how well agencies prepare youths for reentry and how ready the youths feel as they are returning to the community.

¹ Dukakis, K. et al. (2009). *Positive Youth Development: Individual, Setting and System Level Indicators*. Stanford, CA: John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Families, Stanford School of Education.

² PbS’ continuous improvement model provides national standards, uniform data collection surveys, online reporting, analysis tools, expert coaching and training and technical assistance to improve the condition of confinement and quality of life for youths, staff and families involved in juvenile justice agencies. Please go to <https://pbstandards.org> for more information.

³ Schubert, C.A. & Mulvey, E.P. (2013). *Perception and Outcomes in Adolescent Confinement*. Chicago, IL: MacArthur Foundation.

PbS identified measures of preparedness that indicate the skills, tools, resources and safety nets research and experience have shown to increase chances youths will follow a prosocial lifestyle when they leave secure custody and community supervision. Funding for reentry services and programs has increased over the past several years based on the belief that investing in services and programs to prepare a youth to return to the community will put that youth on the path to healthy adolescent development and becoming a productive, purposeful citizen, able to overcome the barriers they face resulting from their juvenile justice system involvement. Given the persistently high numbers of youths who continue offending behavior when they return to the community, the steep challenges they face and the developmental dynamics of the adolescent brain, PbS also identified measures of readiness that indicate a youth’s confidence, hope, resiliency and willingness to show up, whether or not prepared, and take action.

Early Survey Results

PbS tested some of the questions with youths who participated in PbS’ annual Employment Matching Award program. (The award program invites youths in secure and community residential programs who are employed over the summer months to apply for matching funds up to \$1,000.) Nearly 50 youths completed the surveys, rating their agreement with 15 statements related to reentry. While most reported being generally prepared and ready, their responses reflect the differences of being prepared and being ready and show the need for agencies to focus on both providing skills, tools and resources youths need as well as how ready they feel.

PbS is collecting the final round of feedback from volunteers using the Youth Reentry Survey in October and will make it available to the PbS community beginning in November 2019. PbS is similarly integrating questions for families developed as part of the reentry standards project into the PbS Family Survey and will make that available in spring of 2020. We’ve learned over the past 25 years that asking questions and carefully analyzing and responding to the answers is an effective method to improve juvenile justice outcomes.

For more information, please visit pbstandards.org or contact the PbS office at 781-843-2663.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

83%

Strongly agreed that they were ready to get a job or continue their current employment when they leave

74%

Strongly agreed that they are confident that they will succeed

57%

Strongly agreed that they have the support they need to be successfully employed

13%

Strongly agreed that it will be easy to pay their rent/ living expenses