

COLORADO YOUTH
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ENTERPRISE

Synopsis

Goal: Develop a sustainable collaboration among all sectors that work with youth and their families to improve workforce knowledge and standards of practice.

This brief:

- substantiates the need for cross disciplinary training for professionals serving system-involved youth;
- highlights the public will and momentum that is already in place in Colorado to identify the areas of knowledge that a professional in the field should have as well as strategies to develop the infrastructure that enables professionals to obtain the training;
- emphasizes the importance of sustaining this strategic workforce development by institutionalizing professional standards and integrated training opportunities across system entities such as juvenile probation, corrections, and child welfare, among others; and
- demonstrates steps that agencies, divisions and/or departments can take to actualize effective workforce development collaboration.

Context

The critical need for enhanced multi-disciplinary training for youth serving professionals is not a new issue and mirrors a growing concern among national, state and local juvenile justice and child welfare entities such as the Federal Office of Justice Programs' Office for Victims of Crime, the Colorado Criminal and Juvenile Justice task force at the state level, and the Denver Crime Prevention and Control Commission at a local level about the negative impact of 'siloed' professional training on justice-involved youth, their families and communities. A research study conducted in 2008 by the National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP) found that effectively meeting the needs of youth in the juvenile justice system was often impeded by a lack of knowledge about policies across and between state and local agencies. In response, NASHP recommended the use of umbrella entities to not only capitalize on collaborative approaches, but also implement cross-agency training programs.¹

A number of Colorado's key juvenile justice stakeholders², recognizing the significant need to improve standards of practice among youth serving professionals - in order to better prevent youth from unnecessarily progressing deeper into systems and institutions - began exploring best practices around general principles of knowledge necessary for professionals engaged in this field.³ These efforts were adopted by the Colorado Criminal and Juvenile Justice Commission Juvenile Task Force and handed off to the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Council's Professional Development committee, which has since had a series of discussions regarding the current state of

training curricula for Colorado professionals working with justice-involved youth and gaps, needs, barriers and opportunities for developing a youth workforce development enterprise.

What is a Youth Workforce Development Enterprise?

A youth workforce development enterprise would consist of a comprehensive multi-disciplinary training series, which establishes standards of practice for any professional working with system-involved youth. The youth workforce development enterprise would provide two categories of training: primary and secondary core competencies. Primary core competencies trainings are intended to strengthen the foundational capacity of professionals working with system-involved or at-risk youth. For example, one of the key core competencies included in the learning enterprise would address an unmet need among many of Colorado's youth serving professionals – greater understanding of adolescent brain development and how that affects behaviors. Secondary competencies trainings would develop capacity in distinct subject areas specific to system-involved or at-risk youth. The workforce development enterprise is structured to offer three tailored tracks of training, including a series for practitioners working directly with system-involved youth, a series for those who work more indirectly with system-involved youth (i.e., judges or legislators), and a supervisory series, which provides managers, supervisors, and administrators with training on leadership and management of professionals working with system-involved youth.⁴

Why is a Youth Workforce Development Enterprise needed in Colorado?

There are significant benefits to having a statewide youth professional development enterprise, including addressing a critical deficit in knowledge among professionals who serve system-involved youth. As research demonstrates, “once youth are in multiple systems, they risk being subject to multiple processes by multiple agencies with little or no coordination to achieve optimal case plans. Assessments are often duplicated, little or no attention is given to the integration of findings from the various assessments, and case plans may be duplicative or even contradictory. This lack of a coordinated response is not only unproductive in terms of addressing the youths’ needs and criminogenic factors, but it can push youth further into the juvenile justice and other systems when they fail to meet the requirements of contradictory case plans.”⁵ In addition, findings from a recent study conducted by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice’s Research and Planning division, consisting of case sample analysis of 27,311 low risk youth, demonstrated that “diverting low risk youth is the most effective strategy in terms of reducing subsequent reoffending.”⁶

There are numerous examples nationally - captured in federal practitioner guidebooks, research studies and briefs, and state juvenile justice statistical reports, among others - on how a deficit of comprehensive professional development strategies for staff representing the various systems and sectors that work with system-involved youth can impede ensuring best outcomes for those youth. One such example, a recent nationwide study, conducted by *Strategies for Youth*, highlights this issue within a specific context – the need to equip police officers with more adolescent behavioral health knowledge.⁷ Findings from the study demonstrate that nationally, “only 9 states provide new officers with any training on adolescent mental health issues, and only 2 with training on adolescent development and psychology and that forty states’ juvenile justice curricula focus

primarily on the juvenile code and legal issues and provide no communication or psychological skills for officers working with youth.”⁸

Specific to Colorado, a 2012 assessment of the state’s juvenile defender system, conducted by the National Juvenile Defense Center, demonstrated that “the juvenile indigent defense system in Colorado suffers from benign neglect. The lack of statewide leadership, coupled with the lack of professional standards or a dedicated focus on juvenile defense, has left defenders floundering.”⁹ One of the assessment’s key recommendations was to “promulgate and adopt statewide standards of Juvenile Defense Practice in Delinquency Proceedings. Statewide standards, accompanied by an implementation and enforcement strategy, would go a long way in enhancing the juvenile defense function.”¹⁰

While the two examples cited are specific to police officers and juvenile defenders, this inability to understand youth behavior as well as be familiar with behavioral health needs, and screening and assessment within a broader contextual framework applies to any professional who serves system-involved youth and can lead to flawed interventions that most often miss the central issues facing the young person.¹¹

Establishing comprehensive training opportunities, that equip professionals from different disciplines with the knowledge to understand the spectrum of issues that may have initiated a youth’s involvement in a system, will contribute to reduced youth recidivism rates, and subsequently, reduced costs to families and communities. In addition, based on the lessons learned by system entities - such as youth corrections, which historically built off of an adult model - establishing standards of practice tailored specifically for the juvenile population is a necessary step. At a time when system resources - from corrections to probation - are being squeezed, strengthening the professional development of one’s workforce will also better ensure effective utilization of limited resources.

Barriers to Implementing a Youth Workforce Development Enterprise

Transitioning the concept of a statewide youth workforce development enterprise into action presents some questions regarding feasibility due to a number of hard to navigate barriers including: differing mandates across state agencies on required trainings for staff within their various systems, inability for agencies to integrate their existing training infrastructure into an umbrella hub, limited funding to develop or provide training opportunities and limited resources to inform all the disciplines that might touch a system-involved youth on the principles of knowledge that would ensure adherence to standards of practice. Designing, administering and sustaining an overarching youth workforce development enterprise, in itself, would require an investment of funding and resources.

Pathways to implementing and sustaining a Youth Workforce Development Enterprise

There are currently no states that offer some iteration of a statewide workforce development enterprise for professionals working with system-involved youth. However, states such as Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Arizona have taken preliminary steps in this direction. Many states, similar to Colorado, operate professional development academies within individual agencies or departments such as youth corrections or child welfare, but the curricula offered at the

academies are specific to a defined profession and are not integrated with the broader training and knowledge of other systems. Yet, as Pennsylvania's 2012 Juvenile Justice Enhancement strategy report emphasizes "training is a key element of the successful implementation of evidence-based practices in juvenile justice. Without it, departments and service providers will not have the knowledge, skills, and perspectives required to guide juveniles through the social and behavioral processes of behavioral change and recidivism reduction."¹²

The National Center for Juvenile Justice Reform has suggested a starting point for states looking not only at enhanced cross training opportunities, but also at overall better coordination across youth serving systems. In the Center's report, *Addressing the Needs of Multi-System Youth: Strengthening the Connection between Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice*, they reference an academic article that states "as systems consider how they are going to work together to improve outcomes for dually-involved youth, they need to conduct inventories of the resources, best practices, and assessment processes available in their systems, as well as provide corresponding training to all involved personnel (Wiig and Tuell, 2004, rev. 2008)."¹³

Current status of efforts: Colorado has already developed core and secondary areas of training as well as a preliminary inventory of trainings offered across many of the agencies that serve system-involved youth, identifying which trainings address which core competencies and secondary competencies.

Next steps: Recognizing that the full implementation of an overarching youth workforce development enterprise is a longer term effort, the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Council's Professional Development committee is currently taking specific steps to work towards this goal, which include:

- finalizing the inventory of trainings offered across Colorado's systems, including times and locations of where trainings are offered and who can access those trainings;
- identifying barriers as to why trainings offered at a specific division / agency may not be available to staff at a different division or agency (i.e., costs and resources), and potential solutions to those barriers;
- consolidating this information into an accessible format, such as an online resource, that can not only be distributed to the traditionally identified youth serving professionals from child welfare and juvenile justice, but also to professors who are working with students interested in juvenile justice careers, among others;
- ensuring sustainability by institutionalizing the workforce development enterprise through formal commitments from organizations, divisions and departments (i.e., Division of Youth Corrections, Child Welfare, and the Office of Behavioral Health, etc.); and
- securing commitment from state level partners to work collaboratively to fill gaps and improve access for agencies that serve youth at a local level.

In essence, a workforce development enterprise would not operate as a bricks and mortar academy, but would instead utilize and leverage the resources already in place as well as address gaps in training offerings and any access barriers for professionals who are trying to complete trainings. Institutionalizing more comprehensive training and standards of practice and providing a spectrum

of training opportunities that enable professionals to address the needs of the whole youth will ensure the sustainability of the workforce development enterprise.

The Opportunity

Turning the youth workforce development enterprise concept into reality could help achieve a primary juvenile justice goal - improved outcomes for youth by promoting the professional development of system actors from judges to prosecutors to direct service workers. In Colorado, across multiple system stakeholders, the will exists to move the youth workforce development enterprise from design to implementation. In fact, the need for enhanced professional development has been identified as a focus area in multiple statewide efforts around system collaboration. As such, the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention's Professional Development committee, which consists of representatives from many of the key organizations reflected in the state's multiple youth serving systems, is committed to mobilizing resources and expertise to help make this vision a reality. Not only does the will exist to implement a youth workforce development enterprise, Colorado already has a model to build upon in establishing minimal standards of practice for youth serving professionals. The state, by rule and statute, set minimal requirements for those working in child welfare, and subsequently, a comprehensive child welfare academy is being developed to meet those standards - affording an opportunity to expand this concept to other youth serving systems.

We hope that your _____ (organization, division and/or department) will partner with us in ensuring that Colorado is a leader in developing a highly competent youth serving professionals with demonstrated dedication to working in the field by:

- ✓ expanding organizational training offerings and better equipping your staff with the competencies necessary to more effectively meet the needs of the youth they serve;
- ✓ standardizing core trainings in recommended competency areas (in order to meet state established standards of practice);
- ✓ exploring and participating in potential federal, state and local funding opportunities that support collaborative workforce development efforts; and
- ✓ assessing your ability to make the trainings that you offer available to professionals who fall outside of your own agency or divisions.

Your partnership will help maximize Colorado's opportunity to lead the nation in designing a model that more effectively utilizes limited resources and leverages skill sets to ensure that low risk high need youth are appropriately matched with the support and services that best facilitate their success.

End Notes

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- ¹ Cocozza, J., Shufelt, J., & Skowrya, K. (2010) *Systems of Care Programs That Serve Youth Involved With the Juvenile Justice System: Funding and Sustainability*. Washington, D.C.: Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health. Retrieved from: http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/jjResource_funding.pdf
- ² For a list of the juvenile justice stakeholders who have spearheaded efforts to strengthen professional training standards for Colorado's youth serving professionals, please see Appendix A.
- ³ Professional Youth Development Training Academy (PYDT) Policy Statement ~ Denver Crime Prevention and Control Commission, Youth Prevention Committee
- ⁴ PYDTA Policy Statement ~ Denver Crime Prevention and Control Commission, Youth Prevention Committee
- ⁵ Herz, D., Lee, P., Lutz, P., Tuell, J. & Wiig, J. (2012) *Addressing the Needs of Multi-System Youth: Strengthening the Connecting between Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice*. Boston, Massachusetts: The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps. Retrieved from: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/pdfs/msy/AddressingtheNeedsofMultiSystemYouth.pdf>
- ⁶ Baglivio, M. (2013) Florida Department of Justice Briefing Report: The Rick Principle. Tallahassee, Florida. Retrieved from: <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/docs/research2/briefing-report-the-risk-principle.pdf?sfvrsn=0>
- ⁷ Nygaard, G. (2013) *If Not Now, When? Survey Finds Scant Police Training in Juvenile Justice*. Portland, Oregon: Reclaiming Futures. Retrieved from: <http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/blog/if-not-now-when-survey-finds-scant-police-training-juvenile-justice>
- ⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/blog/if-not-now-when-survey-finds-scant-police-training-juvenile-justice>
- ⁹ Puritz, P. (2012) *Colorado: An Assessment of Access to Counsel and Quality of Representation in Juvenile Delinquency Proceedings*. National Juvenile Defender Center in partnership with the Colorado Juvenile Defender Coalition. Pg. 37. Retrieved from: http://www.njdc.info/pdf/Colorado_Assessment.pdf
- ¹⁰ Retrieved from: http://www.njdc.info/pdf/Colorado_Assessment.pdf
- ¹¹ Retrieved from: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/pdfs/msy/AddressingtheNeedsofMultiSystemYouth.pdf>
- ¹² *Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy: Achieving our balanced and restorative Justice Mission through Evidence-based Policy and Practice* (2012). Retrieved from: <http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/342>
- ¹³ Retrieved from: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/pdfs/msy/AddressingtheNeedsofMultiSystemYouth.pdf>

APPENDIX A:

**ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS INVOLVED IN EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS FOR COLORADO'S YOUTH SERVING WORKFORCE**

**The Juvenile Task Force of the Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice
(CCJJ)**

Denver Crime Prevention and Control Commission (DCPCC)

DCPCC's Youth Crime Prevention Committee

Colorado Division of Criminal Justice

Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council (JJDP)

JJDP's Professional Development committee

APPENDIX B: COLLABORATION FOR ENHANCED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (EXAMPLE 1)

<i>Example of expansion of information sharing training to strengthen the professional development of Colorado's youth serving workforce</i>			
Resource	Ask	Audience for the ask	Outcome
Effective information sharing trainings	Open up several training slots in organization's existing information sharing training to staff from outside community-based organizations or government entities that do not offer employees training on effective and appropriate information sharing practices	Any agency that is providing some form of information sharing training including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Children and Youth Information Collaborative • State Judicial • Division of Youth Corrections (DYC) 	Standardize and improve the practice of information sharing statewide to ensure legal expectations regarding confidentiality are met and that information is shared effectively to promote the best outcomes for system-involved youth

APPENDIX C: COLLABORATION FOR ENHANCED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (EXAMPLE 2)

<i>Expansion of Motivational Interviewing training to strengthen the professional development of Colorado's youth serving workforce</i>			
Resource	Ask	Audience for the ask	Outcome
<p>Trainings on psychotropic medication, side effects and potential implications for youth behavior</p>	<p>Open up several training slots in existing available organizational psychotropic medication trainings to other youth serving professionals at community-based organizations or government entities (i.e., State Judicial, DYC) that do not offer employees training in this area</p>	<p>Any agency that is providing training on psychotropic medication including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Child's Representative • Colorado Association of Family and Children's Agencies • The Kempe Center • Colorado Behavioral Health Council 	<p>Broad-based understanding among Colorado's youth serving professionals on Colorado's guidelines on the use of psychotropic medication as well as the reasons for prescribing psychotropic medications, the side effects of the medications and potential implications for youth behavior</p>

APPENDIX D: COLLABORATION FOR ENHANCED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (EXAMPLE 3)

<i>Expansion of Motivational Interviewing training to strengthen the professional development of Colorado's youth serving workforce</i>		
Resource	Ask	Audience for the ask
Motivational Interviewing (MI) training	<p>Provide 5 training slots to Diversion, Child Welfare, juvenile judges and community-based providers, etc. who do not have access to training in this area</p> <p>Offer or expand existing trainings to be situation specific:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Individual ✓ Group ✓ Supervisory ✓ Coaching/ Coding ✓ Instructor Training Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-Based Implementation for Capacity project (EPIC) team • State Judicial • Division of Youth Corrections (DYC) <p>Practices</p> <p>MI training available to all professionals who work with system involved youth</p>