



Nevada Department of Health & Human Services

## Division of Child and Family Services

Nevada Center for Juvenile Justice Innovation

### Characteristics of Effective Programs

Moving towards an evidence-based juvenile justice system can seem costly. A common barrier to implementing “off-the-shelf” evidence-based programs (EBPs) is the cost associated with purchasing the curriculum and ongoing training of staff. In addition, many jurisdictions do not have the independent research capacity to demonstrate that their homegrown programs are effective. With this in mind, researchers analyzed more than 500 studies of programs for juvenile justice-involved youth and identified common factors in the programs that reduce reoffending. These factors have implications for jurisdictions looking to increase the evidence-base of their programming.

#### 1. Consider Risk Level

Programs administered to high risk youth achieved greater reductions in risk to reoffend than those administered to medium or low risk youth. Providing the most resource heavy interventions to the highest-risk youth will have the largest impact on reoffending. This means that there should first be a practice in place to identify high-risk youth and then match them to the most appropriate services.

#### 2. Use Programs with a Therapeutic Approach

Programs rooted in a therapeutic philosophy had more positive effects than those based on control, deterrence, or discipline. Jurisdictions should avoid implementing programs that focus on deterrence and control, such as boot camps or Scared Straight programs, both of which have demonstrated increases in reoffending. Instead, implement programs grounded in a therapeutic approach, for example, mentoring, group counseling, cognitive behavioral training, or social skills building.

Within each category of therapeutic programs, there are specific program types that demonstrate varying levels of impact on reoffense rates. For example, among types of counseling, group counseling and mentoring programs demonstrated the most positive effects. Similarly, skill-building programs grounded in cognitive behavioral techniques reduced reoffending more than other types of skill building (i.e., academic and job related).

#### 3. Amount & Quality of Intervention

The amount of service a youth receives, both in length of days and in hours of service, is important. Each program type has a target duration (days from start to termination) and dose (total contact hours) to achieve the expected effect on reoffending. Additionally, services implemented with fidelity to their model and as the developer intended were more successful than those with high dropout rates, poorly trained personnel, or incomplete service delivery. Jurisdictions should ensure that programs are implemented in the way that the developer intended, with appropriately trained staff and for the recommended dose and duration. Program curricula or processes should be documented so that fidelity can be assessed.

### Creation of the Resource Center

Evidence-based practice is at the heart of Nevada’s juvenile justice reforms under [AB 472](#) which establishes policies for reducing recidivism rates and improving other outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. Juvenile court-involved youth, their families, and their communities have a right to know that court-imposed programs and interventions are effective. AB 472 established an evidence-based program resource center, the Nevada Center for Juvenile Justice Innovation (NCJJI), to support the implementation of evidence-based programs and practices. The NCJJI is led by the [National Center for Juvenile Justice](#), the research division of the Nevada-based [National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges](#).

### News

**October:** NCJJI is excited to announce the release of its [website!](#) The site provides information and trainings on evidence-based programs and practices.

### Additional Resources

For a more in-depth discussion about components of effective programs, review [Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs](#).

### Coming Up Next

The next newsletter will focus on matching programs to a target population.

## We are eager to hear from you!

Contact us to learn more about how the Nevada Center for Juvenile Justice Innovation (NCJJI) can help you. Feel free to share this email with your colleagues and other juvenile justice stakeholders in Nevada. If you would like to add your email to our distribution list, contact Andrew below.



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