

JUVENILE SANCTIONS CENTER

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BULLETIN

VOL. 2 NO. 5, 2005

Overcoming Barriers to Employment for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: A Practical Guide

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This Juvenile Sanctions Center (JSC) technical assistance bulletin gives practical detailed information about overcoming barriers to employment for juvenile offenders. It places the emphasis on the needs of the employer and focuses on how a youth can be counseled to show he or she has the skills and abilities to fill an employer's needs. The authors have concentrated on a common sense approach to matching youth with employers and training youth for high demand occupations along with techniques to recruit enthusiastic employment specialists. We believe that preparing youth for good jobs that require job training and skills is a good formula for avoiding "dead end" employment that our juvenile offender clientele too often face. This bulletin goes beyond "just finding or helping the youth find a job" so that he can be discharged from services or court supervision to the more productive approach of helping a young person get started in a career. The authors, David Brown, Kate O'Sullivan and Sarah Maxwell have extensive experience in the area of youth employment and have carefully surveyed the field to provide the very good examples of successful programs contained herein. The JSC is very interested in bringing assistance to juvenile justice practitioners to help youth in the reentry process as they enter the world of work. It is our hope that this information will enable you to assist the youthful offenders you work with to become the productive, tax-paying adult citizens of tomorrow. The JSC Team is pleased to bring this bulletin to you with the assistance of the U. S. Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

JSC



JUVENILE SANCTIONS
CENTER



The importance of connecting court-involved youth to employment opportunities has received considerable attention by policymakers and youth-serving programs over the past decade. Similarly, facilitating successful reentry from juvenile corrections facilities has recently become a front-burner issue at both the state and national levels, as juveniles released from secure confinement have recidivism rates ranging from 55 to 75 percent.

Overcoming barriers to the employment of juvenile offenders through practical and effective programmatic strategies has become increasingly important as studies continue to find promising outcomes associated with employment for high-risk and court-involved youth. Yet, a particular component of workforce development for young offenders has remained a stubborn challenge: securing, maintaining, and advancing employment opportunities for court-involved youth.

IDENTIFYING PRACTICAL APPROACHES

Interviews with five nationally recognized programs that work significantly with court-involved youth uncovered a number of practical approaches to overcoming employment barriers for juvenile offenders. The programs were selected from among the National Youth Employment Coalition's PEPNet-Awarded initiatives. PEPNet (the Promising and Effective Practices Network, www.nyec.org/pepnet) is the nation's leading resource on what works in youth employment programming. The five programs include: 1) **Career Development Program Bay Cove Academy**, a comprehensive school-to-work

program organized into developmental phases that works with youth coming out of secure detention; 2) **Career Exploration Project/Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES)**, which provides pre-internship preparation and part-time internships at small businesses and non-profits for first-time felony offenders ages 15-19; 3) **Gulf Coast Trades Center (GCTC)**, a residential academic and occupational training program offering intensive, highly structured but individualized programs to adjudicated young men and women, ages 16-19; 4) **Home Builders Institute/Project CRAFT**, a construction industry-sponsored program that integrates youth development strategies into hands-on occupational training, employability skills development, job placement assistance, and follow-up to court-involved youth who are at least 16 years old; and 5) **Marin Conservation Corps**, a one to two year comprehensive program that provides paid service to the environment for court-involved youth who work in crews under an experienced supervisor.

The programs surveyed had program completion rates of 85 percent or more (Gulf Coast Trades Center); recidivism rates as low as 6.2 percent (Project CRAFT); average starting wages of \$7.76 (Project CRAFT); employment retention rates for graduates of 86 percent one year after graduation (Bay Cove); and numerous other successful outcomes, such as documented wage progressions and college enrollments.

ENGAGING EMPLOYERS, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS, AND MEETING EMPLOYERS' NEEDS

From a practical standpoint, having an employment specialist who is passionate about his or her work and who believes in the youth on whose behalf he or she works, is the first step to success. The surveyed programs also responded that understanding labor market demands, making successful youth-employer “matches,” and engaging employers are fundamental to overcoming barriers.

Qualified & Enthusiastic Employment Specialists: Surveyed programs responded with a consistent theme:

Employment specialists (also referred to as Placement, Transition, Career, or Reentry Specialists or Job Developers) are essential players in overcoming barriers. Qualified employment specialists: 1) are good listeners; 2) have excellent written communication skills; 3) appreciate a holistic approach to employment for youth that includes families, probation officers, employers, and literally everyone in their communication links; 4) are creative; 5) have limitless energy; and 6) are “for real.” As a result of years of program development, best practice research, and trial and error, the surveyed program’s practice emphasized “getting your boots dirty,” as job development is done in the field, not from behind a desk.

Training for High-Demand Occupations: High-demand occupations are those for which there are more opportunities in a labor market than skilled workers. Effective training in high-demand occupations is important for court-involved youth, as they gain a competitive advantage in the labor pool when they possess the specific occupational skills sought by employers. The Marin Conservation Corps, for example, reviews labor market projections during its strategic planning meetings every three years. The information they gather is used to improve and change training programs offered to youth. Focus groups, advisory committees (Gulf Coast Trades Center), and including employers in curriculum development (Project CRAFT) are other ways programs garner employer input.

Involving employers informs both the identification of the occupations on which to focus and the content of occupational and “soft skills” training. Service providers can also contact their state or local workforce investment board or a local one-stop career center to ascertain local labor market demands and trends.

Youth-Employer Matching: Employers are more easily engaged when employment specialists match not only skill and labor market needs, but also individuals. Rather than place all youth in one industry or occupation, for example, Bay Cove finds internships and employment for each youth based on the student’s individual interests and strengths. The student is more likely to stay on the job if skills and interests match the employer needs.

Identifying receptive industries and appropriate occupations for court-involved youth is another factor in the employee-employer match. Some industries that the surveyed programs find to be receptive to court-involved youth are construction, landscaping (and tree surgeon companies), mechanical/bicycle shops, film-making (production assistants), music, computers/technology, and fashion.

JOB READINESS

Being “job-ready” means understanding what to expect in the workplace and what is expected of employees. In addition to appreciating the importance of punctuality and developing a positive work ethic, young offenders need to be taught how to work under direct supervision, take orders and directions, deal with criticism, and work productively with co-workers. Programs often role-play difficult and common workplace situations to prepare youth to respond appropriately. Often referred to as “soft skills,” youth must learn non-technical workplace competencies, including “problem-solving and other cognitive skills, oral communication skills, personal qualities and work ethic, and interpersonal and teamwork skills.”¹ At the Gulf Coast Trades Center, youth are assessed on a variety of skill areas, not just occupational. Educational progress and behavioral readiness are also important factors that are addressed by multiple professionals who make up the youth’s treatment team. Before they begin the job search, each youth must demonstrate a level of maturity and progress in the program.

Anger Management: Anger management is a key part of the employment preparation process for many young offenders, as many have histories of aggressive behavior and problems with self-control. Anger often contributes to the reasons court-involved youth quit or are fired. CASES recommends curricula that includes sessions on stress reduction, stopping the escalation, problem-solving communication, and identification of thoughts and emotions that serve as triggers to anger.

Work Experience: Internships, subsidized employment, transitional employment, or other types of

paid or unpaid work experience are effective ways for young offenders to learn about the expectations of the workplace and launch a career. Many of the surveyed programs provide subsidized work experiences that allow young offenders to earn income, develop skills and a work ethic, and give back to their community through service. In addition, some surveyed programs pay the youth’s wages during the first few weeks or months of a job in the private sector, a strategy often referred to as “try-out” employment or “on-the-job training.”

At CASES, youth are placed in internships with mostly private sector employers, but paid by CASES. These students, who would otherwise have had little or no work experience, are able to secure employment and develop a resume and references. At HBI/Project CRAFT, youth are trained through a pre-apprenticeship program, providing hands-on construction training. Students receive an industry-validated certificate, which they can present to an employer as proof of their accomplishments and skill development/competencies. Paid or unpaid, a qualified employee is one with experience and knowledge that is attractive to an identified industry.

OVERCOMING STIGMAS

Stigmas assigned to young offenders by both employers and program employees are of particular concern when working to overcome barriers to employment. Many employers may have a sense of fear or apprehension based on a youth’s involvement in the juvenile justice system. In addition, program staff can unknowingly stigmatize a youth by referring to them as a “juvenile” or “troubled youth” in the presence of employers. Positive and optimistic attitudes by youth and employment specialist alike consistently help to overcome the stigma barrier.

Persuading Employers to Hire Young Offenders: The first steps to persuading an employer to hire a young offender involve: 1) appropriately presenting the program to the employer and focusing on the reputation and quality training provided to youth; 2) using stigma- and jargon-free language to positively persuade the

1 See Welfare Information Network. (December, 2000). *Soft skills training for job readiness*. Washington, DC: WIN. See also Leigh, Wilhelm na; A., Deitra H. Lee, and Malinda A. Lindquist. (1999). *Soft skills training: An annotated guide to selected programs*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

employer that the young job applicant is qualified and prepared to work; and 3) addressing any apprehension or concerns the employer may have. The initial communication with an employer should not be about the student's past; rather, it should present the youth as a qualified potential employee who is part of a training program.

Addressing Their Juvenile Court Record: In many instances, when a youth applies for a job he or she will face the question, on an application or in an interview, "Do you have a criminal record?" The legal answer is almost always "no" for most adjudicated juvenile offenders. Historically, in most states juvenile justice is a civil, not a criminal system. Being adjudicated a delinquent is not legally equivalent to a criminal conviction. However, employers do not always appreciate this technical distinction, and if they find out later about a criminal involvement, could react negatively.

Complicating the process is the issue of expungement, a practice in many states that involves the sealing or destroying of legal records so that an adjudicated youth's record is not available to the public. Those who help young offenders secure employment need to understand the laws and communicate those laws to the youth. For information on relevant laws in your state, visit the National Center for Juvenile Justice's web site at <http://ncjj.servehttp.com/NCJJWebsite/faq/faq.htm>.

The surveyed programs find expungement and a juvenile's legal status less significant than the way in which the young person handles the situation. Even if juvenile records are sealed in their state, the programs advise youth to be open about the fact that they have a record, but to do so "with a plan." Be truthful about the past, but accentuate the new attitude, training, skills, and lifestyle youth have developed and will bring to an employer. For example, when advising youth on how to answer questions about criminal history the Gulf Coast Trades Center uses an approach they call the "Sandwich Technique." Youth are advised to start with a positive response, explaining how they can be a productive employee. Then they explain that at one point they did get into some trouble, without providing specifics. Finally, they explain that while they were at the center, they were able to turn their life around, learned

a skill, earned a GED and a driver's license, and they are confident they can do the job.

Federal Bonding Program: Sometimes employers need greater assurance to convince them to take a chance with a young offender. The Federal Bonding Program was created by the U.S. Department of Labor to alleviate these types of employers' concerns by allowing them to purchase fidelity bonds to indemnify them for loss of money or property sustained through the dishonest acts of their employees. For more information, go to: <http://www.doleta.gov/wtw/documents/fedbonding.cfm>.

SUCCESSFUL FOLLOW-UP AND SUPPORT

Successful programs recognize that job retention and launching a career are the vital program outcomes, more so than mere job placement. Once a young person is employed, frequent follow-up contact with both the youth and the employer is one of the most critical elements to promoting job retention. Averting or addressing the problems that arise in the first few days, weeks, and months on the job contribute significantly to long-term job retention. Visiting the workplace, connecting with employers before or after work hours to avoid interrupting their daily operations, or meeting with youth and their families on the weekends are ways program staff stay informed of how things are going at the workplace. Program staff seek to address issues and problems before they escalate to the point that the youth either is fired or quits. However, the frequency of contact with the young worker and the employer should diminish over time.

Programs successful in promoting job retention have found a variety of innovative incentives to encourage youth to stay on the job. One method for accomplishing this goal is for programs to set up future "trust accounts" for them during the program, paying them to stay in the program, but deferring that payment until they have obtained and retained employment for a specified period. Another strategy is to work with the employer to document the skills the young person is developing and the relevance of these skills to future employment opportunities.

Salvaging Employer Relationships: The youth who is fired or worked for three weeks and never returned to work are phenomena experienced by just about every program and dreaded by all. Overcoming barriers to employment requires quickly addressing a situation in which one youth has potentially tarnished the reputation of the program and, in so doing, prevents newly trained youth from being hired. The CASES program retains an employee, who is also a program graduate, to fill vacancies left by youth. Whenever a student does not fulfill his or her responsibilities to an employer, the CASES employee temporarily fills the position until another graduate is ready to take the job. Thus, employers are never “burned.”

A QUICK REFERENCE TO OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Practical approaches to overcoming barriers to employment for youth in the juvenile justice system employ very simple, but well-planned, programmatic operations carried out by qualified employment specialists who work to reduce stigmas, while assisting youth to find and retain employment. In summary, the PEPNet-Awarded programs surveyed in this bulletin identified a number of practical solutions, including:

- employ employment specialists who understand the needs of the local labor market, business, and youth;
- utilize a holistic approach to job development, placement, and follow-up;
- research and approach receptive industries;
- involve employers in all aspects of the program;
- train for high-demand occupations, revise skills training as needed, and incorporate employer feedback;
- match potential employers to individual youth based on youth interests and skills;
- teach soft skills, anger management, and the requisite skills for demand occupations;
- help employers overcome stigmas through truthfulness, modeling respect for youth, and focusing on youths’ strengths; and
- offer quality customer service to employers.

With the practical strategies offered here, programs that provide occupational and employment preparation to

youth involved in the juvenile justice system are well within reach to overcoming barriers to employment.

RESOURCES

Juvenile Confidentiality and Records

National Center for Juvenile Justice: FAQ about States, Juvenile Records, and Confidentiality Issues. <http://ncjj.servehttp.com/NCJJWebsite/faq/faq.htm>

State Criminal Records. National Conference of State Legislatures. <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/lis/intjust/2002%20blake.pdf>

OJJDP Bulletin. (November, 1998) Confidentiality of Juvenile Court Records and Proceedings. <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jjbulletin/9811/confidential.html>

Labor Market Statistics

U.S Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. <http://www.bls.gov/>

Promising Practices Organizations and Links

National Hire Network. <http://www.hirenetwork.org/>

NYEC’s Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) <http://www.nyec.org/pepnet/index.html>

Publications on Employment for Court-Involved Youth

Brown, David, Sarah Maxwell, Edward DeJesus and Vincent Schiraldi. (2002). Barriers and promising approaches to workforce and youth development for young offenders. Annie E. Casey Foundation. http://www.aecf.org/publications/data/workforce_youth_dev.pdf

Proscio, Tony and Elliott, Mark. Getting in, staying on, moving up: A practioner’s approach to employment retention. Public/Private Ventures. (Winter 1999). <http://www.ppv.org/indexfiles/vindex.html>

Public/Private Ventures. (September, 2002) Serving high-risk youth: Lessons from research and programming. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/149_publication.pdf

Task Force on Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth. (2000). Employment and training for court-involved youth. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/182787.pdf>

Juvenile Sanctions Center Publications

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETINS:

- “Introducing the New Juvenile Sanctions Center”
Vol. 1 No. 1, 2002
- “Structured Decision Making for Graduated Sanctions”
Vol. 1 No. 2, 2002
- “School-Based Probation: An Approach Worth Considering”
Vol. 1 No. 3, 2003
- “Promising Sanctioning Programs in a Graduated System”
Vol. 1 No. 4, 2003
- “A Practical Approach to Linking Graduated Sanctions with a
Continuum of Effective Programs”
Vol. 2 No. 1, 2004
 - “Using Federal Title IV-E Money to Expand
Sanctions and Services for Juvenile Offenders”
Vol. 2 No. 2, 2004
 - “Three Innovative Court-Involved Reentry Programs”
Vol. 2 No. 3, 2004
 - “Resource Reallocation: The Clark County Experience”
Vol. 2 No. 4, 2004

Juvenile Sanctions Center Publications

TRAINING PUBLICATIONS:

- **Graduated Sanctions for Juvenile Offenders: Vol. I
A Training Curriculum Guide 2003**
- **Graduated Sanctions for Juvenile Offenders: Vol. II
A Training Curriculum Guide: Dispositional
Court Hearing to Case Closure, 2005**
- **Graduated Sanctions for Juvenile Offenders: A Program Model
and Planning Guide, 2003**
- **Program Model and Planning Guide, Vol. II: Issues in Juvenile
Sanctions: Dispositional Court Hearing to Case Closure, 2005**
- **Juvenile Sanctions Center, Monograph I, 2003**
- **Juvenile Sanctions Center, Monograph II, 2005**

To obtain copies, call or write:

Juvenile Sanctions Center
National Council of Juvenile and
Family Court Judges
P.O. Box 8970
Reno, NV 89507
775.784.6012
FAX: 775.784.6628

E-mail: mescott@ncjfcj.org

Website: www.ncjfcj.org

E-mail: JSC@ncjfcj.org

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

Mary V. Mentaberry
Executive Director

About the National Council

Since 1937, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges has pursued a mission to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of our nation's children and families. A leader in continuing education opportunities, research, and policy development in the field of juvenile and family justice, the NCJFCJ is unique in providing practice-based resources to jurisdictions and communities nationwide. As the nation's oldest judicial nonprofit membership organization, the NCJFCJ seeks to improve the standards, practices, and effectiveness of the nation's juvenile and family courts while acknowledging and upholding victims' rights, the safety of all family members, and the safety of the community.

This project is supported by grant #2001-JI-BX-K001 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

est. 1937

P.O. Box 8970 • Reno, Nevada 89507

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Reno, Nevada
Permit No. 122

JUVENILE SANCTIONS CENTER

JSC PRINCIPAL PARTNERS

National Council on Crime
and Delinquency
Oakland, California

National Center for Juvenile Justice
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Development Services Group, Inc.
Bethesda, Maryland

JSC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Judge Wadie Thomas, Jr., Chairman
Sep. Douglas Co. Juvenile Court
Omaha, Nebraska

Alan Bekelman
Development Services Group, Inc.
Bethesda, Maryland

Alvin Cohn
National Juvenile Court Services Assn.
Rockville, Maryland

Robert DeComo
National Council on Crime & Delinquency
Madison, Wisconsin

Judge Aundria Foster
Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court
Newport News, Virginia

Lili Garfinkel
Pacer Center, Inc.
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Caren Harp
Union County Prosecutors' Office
El Dorado, Arkansas

E. Hunter Hurst, III
National Center for Juvenile Justice
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Sandra P. O'Brien
Director, Center for Public & Social Policy
Florida Gulf Coast University
Ft. Myers, Florida

David W. Roush
National Juvenile Detention Association
E. Lansing, Michigan

Mark I. Soler
Youth Law Center
Washington, D.C.

WEBSITE
www.ncjfcj.org • JSC@ncjfcj.org

JSC STAFF

David J. Gamble, Project Director
dgamble@ncjfcj.org
775-784-6631

David E. Humke, Project Attorney
dhumke@ncjfcj.org
775-784-6907

Catherine S. Lowe, Training Director
c.s.lowe@worldnet.att.net
775-322-1306

Michael Jamison, Staff Attorney
mjamison@ncjfcj.org
775-784-8070

Joey Binard, Technical Assistance Mgr.
jbinard@ncjfcj.org
775-784-1665

Mary Scott, Sr. Administrative Assistant
mescott@ncjfcj.org
775-784-6811

Thomas Murphy, Program Manager, OJJDP
thomas.murphy@usdoj.org
202-353-8734

