

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Congress set aside \$13.1 million in the Department of Labor's 1998 Program Year Pilot and Demonstration budget for programs to address the needs of youth who are, have been, or are at risk of coming under juvenile justice supervision. The Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) collaborated with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in the Department of Justice (DOJ) and used the funds to support 14 demonstration projects. The projects were to get youth at-risk of criminal involvement, youth offenders, and gang members between 14 and 24 into long-term employment at wage levels that prevent future dependency and break the cycle of crime and juvenile delinquency, which contributes to recidivism and non-productive activities.

In September 1998 DOL offered SGA/DAA 98-015 to fund 14 governmental entities that had proposed Youth Offender Demonstration Projects (YODP) in one of three categories:

**C      Category I - Model Community Projects** are set in high-poverty neighborhoods where comprehensive, community-wide approaches to dealing with youth already have been established. Model Community Projects included:

- (1)      Denver, Colorado;
- (2)      Houston, Texas;
- (3)      Philadelphia, Pennsylvania;
- (4)      Richmond, California; and
- (5)      Seattle, Washington.

**C      Category II - Education and Training for Youth Offenders Initiatives** provide comprehensive school-to-work education and training within juvenile correctional facilities as well as follow-up services and job placement when youth leave correctional facilities and return to their home communities. The Category II sites were:

- (1)      Columbus, Ohio;
- (3)      Indianapolis, Indiana; and.
- (2)      Tallahassee, Florida;

**C      Category III - Community-wide Coordination Projects** work with local youth service providers to develop linkages that strengthen the coordination of prevention and aftercare services for youth in small to medium-size cities with high poverty and high crime. Sites chosen for Category III awards in the first round were:

- (1) Clifton, New Jersey;
- (2) Bakersfield, California.
- (3) Knoxville, Tennessee;
- (4) Minneapolis, Minnesota;
- (5) Pensacola, Florida; and
- (6) Rockford, Illinois;

The projects were to operate for 24 months from the time of contract negotiation, generally from fall 1999 to fall 2001. The first six months were for planning. The remaining 18 months were for implementation.

In May 1999, Research and Evaluation Associates received a task order from DOL/ETA to provide a process evaluation of 12 of the 14 sites. Two Category II sites, Tallahassee and Indianapolis, were to be evaluated under a DOJ contract.

The process evaluation for the Youth Offender Demonstration Project is an implementation study. During the evaluation, Research and Evaluation Associates was to assess the implementation process undertaken by each project and to determine the extent to which each was effective in building upon existing programs and systems to serve the target populations.

The social-development strategy assumed by the design of the Youth Offender Demonstration Projects is based on understanding the concepts of risk and protective factors. Common risk factors, such as availability of drugs, lack of commitment to school, family management problems, and early academic failure are useful in predicting behavior problems. Research reveals that the more risk factors present, the greater the risk of juvenile problem behavior. Protective factors include “healthy beliefs and clear standards for productive, law-abiding behavior, and bonding with adults who adhere to these beliefs and standards.” (Steiner, 1994)

Certain questions about the demonstration projects were included with the Scope of Work for the process evaluation. The evaluation team organized the questions into 10 major questions with general and category-specific sub-questions. The 10 questions were organized in a systems- flow model based on the work of Stufflebeam (1985): **Context, Inputs, Process, and Products (CIPP)**. The ordered set of questions became the Field Guide for structuring three scheduled evaluation site visits to each site. For the Interim Report, evaluators compared the original proposals, first-round site visit reports, and second-round site visit reports, analyzing the data according to the 10 questions developed for the Field Guide.

Summary lessons learned and recommendations are reported below for each category of sites.

## **Category I: Model Community Projects' Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

Category I grant awards were given to set up a combination of gang prevention and suppression projects; alternative sentencing and community service projects for youth offenders; and to support existing case management and job placement services for youth on probation or returning to the community from corrections facilities. By the time of the second site visit, the Category I projects had operated from four to 10 months.

Some generalizations can be made about the five Category I Model Community Projects:

- C All five cities had alternative sentencing options for youth in place before the YODP project was funded.
- C Category I sites reported that the YODP funding fit their vision for the youth of their city, and to some extent, the cities saw the funding as fungible.
- C Not all cities understood the requirements of the demonstration grants. Some communities did not appreciate the need to incorporate all aspects of the demonstration nor the importance of project-specific data gathering.
- C Gang activity meant different things in different communities, but all had significant gang activity in the target neighborhoods. The gangs in some communities are local and territorially based. In others, the gangs formed around particular kinds of criminal activity or were part of an inter-state gang network.
- C The economy where the Category I sites are located is strong and diversified. There is a strong demand for entry-level workers.
- C Political support for the project in all five communities is good.

Lessons learned so far in studying the Category I sites are:

- C Youth crime drew attention to the target neighborhoods, but the issues are deeper. The youth from these neighborhoods are leaving school before high school graduation and before achieving the minimum skills for obtaining career-oriented work at livable wages. An ongoing tension within the projects has been the need and desire of both partners and clients to move youth into the kind of work positions envisioned by the demonstration and the inadequacy of academic preparation for such work. The youth also bring to the project myriad life and work readiness skill needs. The time required to build relationships with the youth adds to the tension between supporting youth and moving them toward work. Several sites, however, found that when they sent youth to work places quickly, they soon lost their jobs.

- C Communities that received Category I funds already had demonstrated a commitment to youth employment through other grant activities, yet the connection between youth offender agencies and youth employment agencies was new. The partnerships are likely to continue and the demonstration was the instrument for this breakthrough.
- C Because cities had other youth employment programs in place, many partners knew each other and had worked with each other. This was an important building block for the Youth Offender Demonstration Projects. These other grants established youth employment as an important issue for the cities. The demonstration projects built on this base.
- C The timing of the demonstration takes advantage of the long period of economic growth. The demonstration provides a window of opportunity for workers who have been court-involved to find jobs. Should these workers develop a reliable work record, they have a good chance of making a living their whole work life.
- C All projects learned as they operated. The two partnerships that were realigned in significant ways taught something about how to make the integrated services model work.
- C One surprise in the demonstrations has been the large number of younger youth recruited into the program. The importance of recommending to employers youth who have completed high school or GED training focused project attention on keeping youth in school. This was easier than trying to make up course work later. Project partners are concerned, however, they lack time to demonstrate the effectiveness of the youth offender employment intervention when the enrolled youth are several years from being expected to assume full-time employment.
- C All projects included partners or collaborators representing the major actors in the Youth Offender Demonstration model. These included: Employment and Training, Alternative Sentencing, Aftercare for Youth Returning from Incarceration, and Gang Prevention Initiatives. The projects have emphasized employment training along with community service activities as a component. Aftercare is provided through the employment training, case management and support services. Anti-gang measures are indirect in that the projects view preparation for a job with good wages as deterrents to gang membership. Staffs reported that they often did not know if clients were gang members.
- C As the projects developed, the importance of local schools has emerged more strongly. Schools, however, have proved difficult to bring into operating partnership with the community-based and employment and training organizations.
- C None of the projects involved the youth and their parents/caregivers in the design of the projects. Two projects, however, have developed activities that engage families.
- C Three of five Category I sites were slow to move from the planning to the implementation

phase. The sites appear to have needed greater clarification of expectations and fairly intensive technical assistance early on to develop a practical and strategic implementation plan that addressed each site's local barriers, including political ones.

- C All projects struggled with clarifying partners' roles and developing a common project vision. It appears that the sites needed technical assistance to help them with internal operations earlier in the demonstration.
- C Category I projects are led by staff with both interest and experience in youth employment, youth development, and/or juvenile justice. The younger, newly hired front-line workers seemed hard to keep on the project in several sites. The projects' short duration was offered as an explanation of why staff members left for more secure employment.
- C Most projects planned for services to be delivered serially. Work readiness and life skills are offered after-school and at a different facility from the educational component, whether that is high school or GED preparation classes. The model of integrating work experience with career exploration is virtually absent. Once youth are assigned to work experience or educational programs, even part time, it is hard to “wrap other services around” these other commitments. The opportunities for developing broader career awareness through job shadowing and internships seemed rare in many of the projects.
- C Projects struggled with demonstrating success, especially when clients were not ready or able to enter the workforce. Project staffs wish there were other measurable and acceptable benchmarks that demonstrate progress before youth are employed full time. Benchmarks, for example, could include: increasing dependability in participating in project activities; remaining free of further convictions; passing part or all of the GED examinations; being able to keep a part-time job; or making acceptable progress (credits earned) toward a diploma.
- C The projects were slow to develop project-specific databases, even though each partner collects data and reports them to someone. Several communities are changing their employment and training databases to accommodate the new Workforce Investment Act (WIA) activities. These might, in time, produce documentation of project efforts.
- C Youth appeared to understand the importance of getting jobs. The promise of help in finding steady work at good wages attracts and keeps many youth in the projects.

#### Category I: Model Community Recommendations

1. Projects need to have working relationships with key leaders in the courts and schools who will become engaged in the employment and training, aftercare, community service, and gang-prevention strategies.
2. Projects need to include youth and families in project planning and activities.

3. Projects need to demonstrate a clear lead agency and provide in their budget for that agency to remain involved with the project partners and their activities.
4. Project agencies need to have some experience with pilot projects or be able to demonstrate an understanding of the particular requirements of a demonstration grant.
5. Projects need to have a practical understanding of the population they work with and demonstrate in planning and budgeting what it takes to transition these youth into full time employment.
6. Projects need to work with technical assistance specialists early in their planning to clarify roles, cross-agency responsibilities, and development of an effective implementation plan.
7. Projects need to experiment with alternative ways to enrich the career development aspects of the youth employment and training.
8. Projects need to develop management information systems that allow them to document the outcomes of the YODP efforts.

## **Category II: Education and Training for Youth Offender Initiatives Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

Category II Education and Training for Youth Offenders Initiative projects were designed to provide comprehensive school-to-work (STW) education and training within juvenile correctional facilities. The projects also were designed to provide aftercare services and job placements as youth leave these facilities and return to their communities. Category II is represented in the Research and Evaluation Associates evaluation project only by the Ohio site. The Ohio project, however, comprises two youth offender correctional facilities that differ significantly: Mohican Youth Center is for older youth who have both criminal and substance abuse problems; the Youth Development Center is for younger youth who have committed less-serious offenses.

The Ohio Department of Youth Services submitted its project with the intention of developing strong STW programs in two correctional facilities and supporting the youths' transition back to their communities with model aftercare service programs. The ultimate goal was to reduce recidivism.

The project was to target Cuyahoga County youth primarily from two main cities, Cleveland and East Cleveland. The school dropout rate in these communities is 58 percent and 50 percent respectively. Youth offenders typically are from poor, single-headed households without a member gainfully employed, have substance abuse problems, and have failed in school. The youth were characterized as lacking involvement in sports, church, or other constructive activities. Instruction in the facilities began in spring 2000 and the

first youth to return to the community occurred in June 2000. Youth enter and leave the facilities, depending on their sentence rather than in relation to completing the training program.

Lessons learned so far from studying the implementation of the Ohio Category II site are:

- C The projects are developing a transition process between the youth correctional facilities and the home communities of youth from Cuyahoga County. Each of the facilities is setting up a three-month plan for each youth returning to Cuyahoga County. There also is increased communication between the aftercare specialists at the county Department of Treatment Services and the staff at the residential facilities.
- C Transition back to Cuyahoga County began in June 2000, but it was August 2000 before there were more than a handful of youth released to the county. Some aspects of the transition are not in place or are not yet operating smoothly.
- C After returning to Cuyahoga County, youth receive more intense aftercare than had previously been the case. Both aftercare specialists and case managers of community-based organizations monitor the youth.
- C Staff at the county's Department of Justice Affairs and the regional Ohio Department of Youth Services have developed a cooperative relationship that did not exist before the project. Together the county and state agencies have developed the Relapse Prevention Program to serve both younger and the older youth. Both staffs now use a common risk-assessment instrument.
- C Mohican Youth Center (MYC) has a strong tracking system. After youth are released other service providers keep separate records. The Youth Development Center (YDC) does not have a strong MIS system, which impedes tracking the youth.
- C Youth are not finding jobs in the Information Technology (IT) occupations for which they were being trained. Most youth are younger than most workforce participants. They lack the academic skills to exploit the IT skills they learn.

#### Category II: Education and Training for Youth Offender Initiatives Recommendations

1. The Ohio site is comprised of two projects, different in design and different in target population. They should be considered as two separate sites.
2. The projects need to develop a project-specific database, if evaluation outcomes are to be examined and assessed.
3. Youth can become disengaged from the project once probation is completed. It might help if there were an incentive system to keep them connected to services and treatment

interventions.

4. Since youth are not finding jobs in IT positions, partner agencies could find them more volunteer or community service positions that would employ what they have learned until they are better prepared for more challenging work or personal activities that require IT skills.
5. Although the Ohio project is committed to developing IT skills that will be important in any industry they enter, Ohio might explore other STW programs that prepare youth for industries that pay good wages as well. These include, for example, laying fiber optic cable.
6. Although the partnership has increased communication among agencies offering services to the same target population, several communication issues still need to be addressed. An important issue is aligning the IT curriculum in Cuyahoga County with the IT curriculum of the two facilities.
7. Category II projects require the development of operating partnerships, especially when youth are being released back to their community. The projects are thus experiencing all the relationship-building issues during the second year of the grant that projects in other categories addressed months earlier. The projects need technical assistance in communication, role definition, and operating procedures and styles.
8. Most youth are younger than most workforce participants. It will be several years before project designers can evaluate the project's impact on the kind of jobs the youth will be able to obtain when they become age-eligible. The projects need interim benchmarks of progress until employment outcomes become more feasible.

### **Category III: Community-wide Coordination Projects' Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

Category III grants were awarded to focus on high poverty and high crime areas in medium-sized cities. The design was for grantees to work with youth service providers to develop linkages that strengthen the coordination of prevention and recovery services for youth offenders. Grantees were:

- C to build upon existing employment and training, recreation, conflict resolution, and other youth crime and gang prevention programs;
- C to establish alternative sentencing and community service options for youth offenders, especially those who have been gang members; and
- C to establish or continue gang suppression activities.

Lessons learned studying the Category III sites so far indicate that implementing a successful project requires:



- C A clear vision. The most successful Category III projects were those that were well conceived and based on sound theoretical grounds. The projects reinforced the need for adherence to practices and principles that have been shown to reduce youth delinquency and crime while developing the potential of youth to lead happy and productive lives.
- C Broad community support. The most successful Category III sites sought broad community involvement in the projects. They did this by nurturing and strengthening existing partnerships and by building new ones with public, private, and non-profit organizations. Organizations that were well established and had strong partnerships in place were more successful than those that had to build them from the ground up.
- C Shared leadership. The most successful Category III projects shared both the leadership and credit for the project with partners. Those that did not were unable to build and maintain momentum for the projects.
- C An ability to deliver benefits to clients. The most successful projects were those that stressed service delivery by enhancing and establishing linkages and partnerships with other agencies and organizations. In addition, the study appeared to indicate the necessity of having facilities situated near target groups.
- C A committed staff. A highly motivated and dedicated staff, whether green or seasoned, is an important asset and magnifies a project's efforts to serve clients. Staffs at Category III sites generally displayed a commitment to their jobs and to serving client needs.
- C Specialized technical assistance (TA). The sites found technical assistance helpful, useful, and necessary. TA is essential if projects are to remain on track and receive help when they encounter barriers. TA also may enhance a project's ability to become sustainable, after grant funding ends.

In addition, several barriers and challenges appear to have affected the effectiveness of the projects. These lessons learned included:

- C A lack of stable funding commitments. Even sites that appeared to be the most financially viable, and had the greatest chances of being sustained, feared they would be unable to find additional funding once the grant ends. From the beginning, projects need to understand the importance of seeking TA to help them learn ways to secure funding streams that will ensure that the projects are sustained in the future.
- C Confusion about measures of success. All six Category III sites were unclear or confused about how evaluators would measure their efforts and determine whether they were successful. The sites, in general, assumed they would be evaluated on their ability to place clients in jobs, rather than on their ability to develop and enhance linkages and partnerships. In the future, projects must understand clearly their responsibilities required by a grant. Additional on-site TA may help ensure that projects remain on track and focus on primary tasks.

- C A lack of a uniform reporting system. The projects operated without uniform reporting systems. Although all maintained records, the reports that each submitted provided data in different formats. In addition, reports did not uniformly classify participants according to services they received, demographic information, status in the project, or other information that helps determine project performance and whether the project meets expectations, goals, and objectives. In the future, reporting requirements for projects should be established and specified clearly.

### Category III: Community-wide Coordination Projects Recommendations

1. Projects should focus more on developing community-wide partnerships, rather than on providing employment services directly. Not only does the demonstration project grant require this, but it also is a primary means for projects to become sustainable after grant funding ends. Building and enhancing partnerships also will ensure that gaps in services provided to clients are filled.
2. Projects should give special attention to strengthening partnerships with the Juvenile Justice System. The projects must better educate prosecutors, judges, and probation officers that their projects can serve as important tools in community efforts to reduce youthful crime and recidivism.
3. Projects should increase their knowledge of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the opportunities it provides youth. Projects must learn that One-Stop Centers and closer involvement of Youth Councils can help them deliver services to target populations more effectively. In addition, closer involvement with Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) may help projects secure funding to ensure sustainability after the grant ends.

### Closing

Over and over again, youth interviewed during the evaluation site visits mentioned that the promise of jobs at a decent wage is what drew them to the project and keeps them engaged with it. Use of a model of crime prevention that includes employment training and placement seems critical for these youth. Probation officers concurred that assistance with the transition to employment was an important feature that led them to refer youth to the YODP project. At this juncture in the projects' history, the limiting factor is the time it might take to demonstrate that an investment in education and training will result in more youth offenders, or youth at risk of criminal involvement, transitioning to full-time employment successfully.