



Center for Juvenile Justice Reform

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Contact: Kristina Rosinsky

klr45@georgetown.edu

202-687-7657

Center Presents New Approach to Improve the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs

Washington, D.C. – Georgetown Public Policy Institute’s Center for Juvenile Justice Reform released a paper today titled “Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs: A New Perspective on Evidence-Based Practice” at a symposium at the Georgetown University Hotel and Conference Center. The paper is co-authored by Mark W. Lipsey, James C. Howell, Marion R. Kelly, Gabrielle Chapman, and Darin Carver.

The paper presents a new approach to evidence-based practice that will produce better outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. The paper begins with an overview of the different approaches to evidence-based practice and introduces a tool Dr. Lipsey has developed to better make use of our vast knowledge base. It then embeds this new approach within a comprehensive juvenile justice framework that will allow our increased knowledge to benefit the entire juvenile justice continuum, rather than a handful of programs serving a limited number of youth.

For years, states have struggled with how to implement the most effective treatment programs to reduce recidivism rates. As the authors state, “Translation of research into practice is always a challenge, but it has been exacerbated...by overly narrow conceptions of how research should be used to inform juvenile justice practice.” Several individual programs have been found to be successful and promoted by national organizations, but it is often difficult to replicate the circumstances that contributed to their effectiveness, they are costly to implement and they are often used to the detriment of local programs that produce positive outcomes, but do not have the research base to qualify as a “model program.” For these reasons, there has been a struggle in taking evidence-based practices to scale, and therefore, the scope of their benefits has been limited.

The framework for evidence-based practice described in this paper offers a solution by presenting a tool that can be used to measure the effectiveness of a variety of existing juvenile justice programs and provide recommendations on how to improve them.

The tool, developed by Dr. Mark W. Lipsey, was developed by analyzing hundreds of studies to determine best practices for juvenile justice programming. This approach overcomes the main barriers holding states back from implementing model programs by having states retain and refine their own programs that are shown to follow the best practice guidelines.

“What’s more is that this new approach embeds this tool within a larger juvenile justice framework. It is not just about evaluating programs, but ensuring that there is a sufficient array of programs available, that youth are matched to appropriate services based on risk and need and that services are evaluated to determine if we are achieving the outcomes the science tells us we should be able to realize,” said Shay Bilchik, director of the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and research professor at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute. “This is what has often been missing from the evidence-based practice conversation in the past.”

Jurisdictions doing promising work on this issue will be featured at the symposium. Among featured speakers is Laurie Robinson, Assistant Attorney General of the Office of Justice Programs at the U.S. Department of Justice, who will deliver the opening plenary address. The invitation-only event will also include a panel discussion with the authors as well as a panel of policy experts to discuss the implications of the paper on federal and state law and practice. At the symposium, CJJR will announce that it is launching a new program to help states implement this approach in their jurisdictions.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this effort will help juvenile justice systems enhance the effectiveness of their interventions and achieve more positive outcomes for the youth they serve.

The paper and symposium materials will be available on the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform’s Web site at <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/>

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