Are Probation Programs Working?

Evaluating Program Effectiveness
Juvenile Probation in 2011

In 2011,

- 79,875 juveniles were referred to juvenile probation departments
- 28,835 juveniles were supervised per day on deferred adjudication and probation
- 991 juveniles were committed to state institutions
Juvenile Probation in 2011

Juvenile probation departments offered 33 types of community-based programs in addition to supervision, services and residential placement.
Juvenile Probation in 2011

Approximately $491 million in state and local funding was expended to provide services to youth in the juvenile probation system.
But, Can You Tell Me…

Are Probation Programs Effective?
Anecdotally....

- We believe that community-based programs are “working” because:
  - Referrals to juvenile probation departments are down
  - Commitments are down

- But what do we really know?
What We Know and Don’t Know

- Know outcomes of juveniles served in community-based programs
- Know recidivism of juveniles participating in programs
- Don’t know what programs work best with which kids
  - Program Registry will enable us to know this
What Works in Juvenile Probation

- TJJD will be evaluating community-based programs to determine “what works”
  - Looking at programs as well as program components
- Key to this effort is data provided by departments through the Program Registry and the extract data
Goal for Program Evaluation

- With evaluation results TJJD will develop “guides” for community-based programs
  - Goal to replicate what is working
  - Provide technical assistance to departments that may need to enhance programs / program outcomes
- Create “best practice” for Texas juvenile probation programs
Today’s Session

Using an example, we will go over basic information on:

- Developing a program
- Maximizing program effectiveness
Which Program is Right?

- When developing or selecting a program it is important to know what you are trying to achieve and with whom.

- Even the best program might not be effective if it does not match your goals or fit your intended population.
Evidence of Effectiveness

- Programs don’t have to be “evidence based” to be effective

- BUT - Research findings for juvenile programs do exist and should be used in program selection whenever possible
Developing a Program

- Define the problem you want to address
- Determine the **Goal** or purpose of the program
- Set **objectives** that are measurable
- Select **activities** that fit the program objectives and can accomplish program goals
The department has identified a need for services for female offenders.

- Young girls are at risk of becoming involved with truancy, running away, drug use and unhealthy relationships - which leads to juvenile justice contact, prostitution and victimization.
Program Example – Female Offender

- Goal of program is to prevent young girls from further entering the justice system by teaching them to make appropriate and “healthy” choices
  - Focus on “low-level” female offenders that are exhibiting “gateway” behaviors
  - Provide services to girls and their parents
Program Example – Female Offender

- Objectives should directly relate to the goals for the program
- Objectives must be measurable
  - Juveniles participating in the program will not be truant
  - Parents will learn parenting skills, with focus on communication
  - Juveniles will learn how to make appropriate choices and manage anger
Program Example – Female Offender

- Develop activities that will achieve the program’s objectives and goals
  - Parent group counseling to discuss challenges of day to day supervision and communication with daughter
  - Place each juvenile with mentor
  - Create a “healthy choices” curriculum that all must complete
Is the Program Working?

- How do you know if the program is working as planned?

- Even if the program is working as planned, is it achieving its stated goal?
Six months after creation, the Choices program is up and running.

The program has served 30 girls to date.

The length of stay is longer than expected as girls are not “graduating” from the low level phases.

Of the 12 girls that have left the program, 6 have completed successfully.
What to Do?

- Look at the program a few months after implementation to determine if it is operating as planned
  - Are the girls in the program the “target” population?
  - Have all of the activities begun?
  - Do the selected activities still “make sense” for the program objectives and goals?
Make the Program More Effective

- Girls entering the program were not first time offenders
- Girls were not being paired with mentors until phase 3 of the program
- The program required the girls to come to the department three nights a week
- Revise selection criteria to match target population
- Pair girls with a mentor in the first phase of the program
- Reduce the number of times the girls have to travel to the office and/or provide transportation
Determining Program Effectiveness

- Continue to review your program to ensure it is effective
  - Check that goals and objectives are being met
  - Identify measures of program impact
  - Collect information
Determining Program Effectiveness

- Look at the impact of the program in both the short and long-term to determine effectiveness.

For Choices program:
- Look at completion rates as a short-term measure.
- Look at subsequent arrests and referrals as a long-term measure.
Evaluating “Outcomes”

- Don’t forget to look at program operation when determining outcomes
  - Check that the program is operating as intended before determining impact

- “Analyze” the data that is gathered from the program
  - Look at information in conjunction with other data that is collected
Use What You Learn to Make Program Better

- Use information generated from the program to make modifications
  - Change activities to better suit objectives

- Don’t change too much too soon
Don’t be Afraid to Ask for Help

- Resources are available to assist in program selection and design, performance and outcome measures, and data collection.