



Oregon Youth Authority

Issue Brief

December 2011

Guiding youth offenders toward positive development

10

Number of OYA close-custody correctional and transition facilities

750

Approximate number of youth offenders supervised in OYA close-custody facilities

1,075

Approximate number of youth offenders supervised by OYA in communities

302

Total Funds, in millions of dollars, allocated to OYA in 2011-2013

258

General Fund, in millions of dollars, allocated to OYA in 2011-2013

87

Approximate percent of OYA's budget spent locally in facilities and communities

Overview

How society thinks of youth offenders determines how those youth are treated — as a victim, as a villain or as a resource. The Oregon Youth Authority uses evidence-based treatment programs that view youth offenders as resources.

Youth offenders as victims

This viewpoint considers youth offenders to possess a fundamentally different psychological and emotional makeup than non-offending youth. Youth offenders, when viewed as victims, are considered to be incapable of conventional behavior without therapeutic interventions. The principal intervention strategy is individual or family-based therapy.

Youth offenders as villains

This viewpoint considers youth offenders to be guided by fundamentally different motivations and impulses that inevitably lead to deviant behavior. Youth offenders, when viewed as villains, are considered to be incapable of conventional behavior without strict discipline and the threat of punishment. The principal intervention strategy is deterrence and retributive punishment.

Youth offenders as resources

This viewpoint considers youth offenders to be largely similar to other adolescents, but with fewer social assets and more risk factors. Their criminal behaviors are considered to be a result of a typical adolescent need for status, belonging, power, and excitement, combined with a lack of empathy and other risk factors. Youth offenders, when viewed as resources, are considered to be capable of conventional behavior with sufficient access to supports and pro-social opportunities. The principal intervention strategies are skill development, attachment and engagement.

The treatment programs provided to youth offenders in the care and custody of the Oregon Youth Authority are designed to help these youth acknowledge accountability, learn pro-social attitudes and behaviors, avoid risky thinking and actions, and engage in reformation and restitution.

Oregon Youth Authority

530 Center Street NE
Salem, OR 97301-3765
Reception: 503-373-7205
En Espanol: 503-373-7434
Fax: 503-373-7622
Web: www.oregon.gov/OYA



Mission

The Oregon Youth Authority protects the public and reduces crime by holding youth offenders accountable and providing opportunities for reformation in safe environments.



Vision

Youth who leave OYA go on to lead productive, crime-free lives.



Core Values

Integrity
Professionalism
Accountability
Respect



Director

Colette S. Peters



Deputy Director

Fariborz Pakseresht



Assistant Director
for Business Services

Jean Straight



Assistant Director
for Community Services

Philip Cox



Assistant Director
for Facility Services

Karen Daniels

Measuring outcomes

The most frequent measure of success is recidivism — what percentage of youth offenders reoffend. However, that is just a partial measure of success. If OYA's vision is that youth who leave OYA go on to lead productive, crime-free lives, it becomes important to find ways to measure success by measuring positive outcomes, not just the negative outcome of recidivism. This philosophical shift is akin to measuring health rather than illness.

Positive youth outcome measures track the development of new skills and competencies, educational attainment, job attainment and retention, the development of a pro-social identity, and other elements essential to successfully transitioning to adulthood and becoming a positive contributor to the community. Positive gains in these areas promote public safety by making recidivism less likely.

While it is important to continue to track recidivism as a fundamental outcome measure, it also is important to add measures of positive outcomes to gain a fuller understanding of effective programs and services. The goal of connecting recidivism and positive youth outcomes is to paint a more vivid picture of a juvenile justice agency's impact on the youth it serves. Effective programs will help ensure that youth return to their communities with increased skills, gained competence, and new tools to help them become productive crime-free citizens.

OYA already is engaged in efforts consistent with the measurement of positive youth outcomes. These activities include assessing youth for risk and protective factors upon admission, completing case-planning to provide treatment and opportunities for youth to develop skills, and engaging families and communities in the process.

The next step is to identify the most relevant positive youth outcomes to track. Initial measurements may include the number of youth completing vocational training, the number of resumes or job applications submitted, the number of youth earning a high school diploma or GED, and the number of volunteer hours completed.

The complementary goals of this approach are to protect public safety and improve outcomes for youth. By knowing which factors help a youth successfully transition into adulthood and thrive in his or her community, OYA can make informed, evidence-based programming decisions that ensure an appropriate array of services. Tracking positive youth outcomes is, in effect, the next step in OYA's ongoing goal of expanding and advancing the use of evidence-based practices for all youth offenders.