

Implementing Juvenile Justice System Improvement in Georgia

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The Crime and Justice Institute (CJI) at Community Resources for Justice strives to make criminal and juvenile justice systems more efficient and cost effective, and to promote accountability for outcomes.

We take pride in our ability to improve evidence-based practices in public safety agencies and gain organizational acceptance of those practices in difficult work environments. We create realistic implementation plans, put them into practice, and evaluate their effectiveness to enhance the sustainability of corrections policies, practices, and interventions.

CJI provides nonpartisan policy analysis and practice assessment, capacity- and sustainability-building technical assistance, research and program evaluation, and educational activities throughout the country.

BACKGROUND

The juvenile justice outcomes promised by evidence-based programs are only achievable if the programs are delivered as designed and the curricula are followed. All too often, a jurisdiction will implement a program and wonder why it's not getting the same results as the research showed. How do we ensure we are getting the best results possible for youth? We assess and maintain program model fidelity.

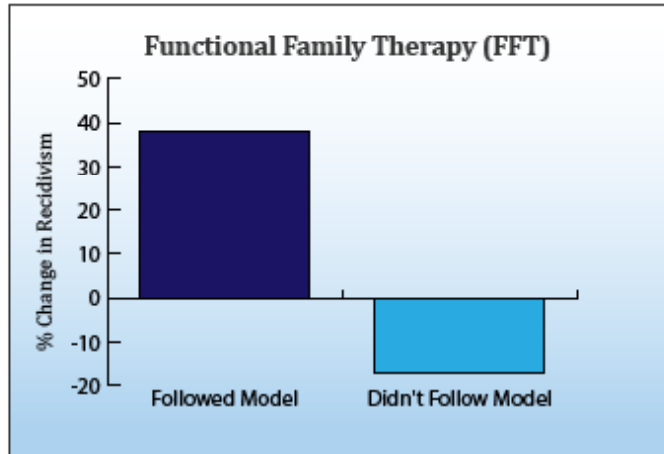
PROGRAM MODEL FIDELITY

Program model fidelity is implementing a program the right way. Research has shown that when a program is delivered the right way, or with fidelity to the model, recidivism rates for program participants involved in the juvenile justice system can be significantly reduced.



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The graph shows an example highlighting the delivery of Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and the change in recidivism rates when the model is followed (dark blue) and not followed (light blue). Above the line indicates that there was a positive change in recidivism, meaning it was reduced; below the line indicates a negative change in recidivism of youth, meaning it increased. In other words, when FFT is delivered according to the model as designed, we see better outcomes for youth. In fact, FFT resulted in a 38 percent reduction in recidivism when the program was delivered with fidelity. When it wasn't, recidivism increased 17 percent.

Ongoing assessment of program model fidelity is crucial. The goal of the juvenile justice system is to address the needs of youth through treatment and accountability, and we do not want to inadvertently reduce their chances of success by implementing programs poorly.

PROGRAM MODEL FIDELITY IN GEORGIA'S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

In 2012, Georgia embarked on comprehensive juvenile justice improvement to reduce out-of-home placements, protect public safety, reduce costs, and improve outcomes for youth. By May 2013, Governor Nathan Deal signed into law a set of policies designed to improve youth outcomes in the juvenile justice system. The policies were expected to save \$85 million over five years by ensuring placement in youth facilities was reserved only for youth adjudicated for the most serious offenses. Those savings would, in turn, be reinvested to bolster evidence-based programs in the community through a Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Program.

Georgia has invested \$37 million in the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant Program since FY 2014. The state's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) manages the grant program and oversees contracted community-based providers for the delivery of five evidence-based programs.

CJI's Program Model Fidelity Framework

Training Sites to Conduct Model Fidelity Assessments

- Model fidelity research and methods
- Using model fidelity assessment tools to provide feedback

Assessment Tools

- Model Fidelity Initial Interview Guide
- Program Director Interview Guide
- Program Staff Interview Guide
- File Review Checklist
- Group Observation Form
- Program Participant Survey
- Model Fidelity Site Visit Report Template
- Coaching to ensure quality implementation of the assessment process
- Model Fidelity Report Card to track program fidelity over time

Key Outcomes from Georgia's Incentive Grant Programs¹

- Through a partnership between CJCC and the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), Georgia now has at least one evidence-based community alternative available to judges in every judicial district of the state, covering 98 percent of Georgia's at-risk population.
- Since 2013, more than 7,200 youth have been served by a fiscal incentive grant program.
- From 2013-2016, the state substantially reduced the number of youth sent to state custody and the out-of-home population.



With the state's investment in the grant program, the CJCC wanted to make sure the programs being delivered were consistent with the program manuals and the methods of delivery that had been rigorously evaluated. But how would CJCC know if the programs were implemented with fidelity?

Georgia's selection as one of three inaugural states to participate in the Comprehensive Juvenile Justice System Improvement Initiative of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provided an answer to that question. OJJDP's technical assistance provider for the initiative, the Crime and Justice Institute (CJI), is charged with helping states implement their improvements and build capacity to sustain the improvements over time.

Assessing program model fidelity needs to be an ongoing process. Rather than coming in, conducting an assessment, and handing the findings and recommendations to the CJCC, CJI provided a framework to assist CJCC in the development of a model fidelity assessment process to continue into the future.

¹ Report of the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform, February 2017.
https://csjjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/JR-in-GA_Report-of-the-Council-on-CJ-Reform.pdf

CJI's framework (see sidebar Page 2) includes training, the provision of assessment tools, coaching, and a reporting structure to monitor program fidelity over time.

Georgia recognized the importance of not only selecting programs with a research base, but also investing the fiscal and human resources to ensure those programs are delivered with fidelity. To apply the framework CJI offered, Georgia hired a Model Fidelity Coordinator and invested in a team of consultants to conduct the assessments and provide feedback and coaching to the contracted program providers. CJI trained all staff on the fidelity assessment process and the research behind program model fidelity. In addition, CJI has trained program staff as trainers on the Principles of Effective Intervention to ensure that the implementation of evidence-based practices can continue beyond CJI's technical assistance. By embracing this process and integrating program model fidelity into regular practice, Georgia is ensuring quality programs are being delivered to set youth on a path to a brighter future.



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