

# **YOUTHFUL OFFENDER JOB READINESS PROGRAM**



**CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

**DIVISION OF JUVENILE PROBATION & DETENTION SERVICES**

**SMAART PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

**April 2012**

**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS  
DIVISION OF JUVENILE PROBATION & DETENTION SERVICES**

## YOUTHFUL OFFENDER JOB READINESS PROGRAM

### **MISSION STATEMENT:**

The mission of the Circuit Court of Lake County is to serve the public. The Court accomplishes this mission by providing a fair and responsive system of justice, committed to excellence, and fostering public trust, understanding and confidence.

The Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services supports the mission of the Court by serving a juvenile justice system that ensures public protection from further acts of juvenile delinquency, and assisting in the accountability and rehabilitative needs of youthful offenders. The Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services provides a comprehensive assessment process and continuum of evidence-based interventions for youth and families referred to the division in order to reduce recidivism and increase compliance with court-ordered conditions. The division also strives to facilitate an environment of collaboration and cooperation among juvenile justice partners that will enhance the delivery of evidence-based services for justice-involved youth and families.

### **PROGRAM PURPOSE:**

As part of the comprehensive assessment of youth referred to Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services, the division utilizes the Youth Assessment and Screening Inventory (YASI). The YASI is an evidence-based risk and needs assessment and case planning tool. The domains of the instrument identify those factors that place youth at a greater risk for recidivism, as well as those protective factors which can reduce such risk. Using the domains of the YASI in the case planning process allows probation officers to develop tailored interventions that reduce risk factors and increase protective factors of offenders, which will reduce the offender's risk for recidivism. The domains of the YASI are:

- Legal History
- Family Issues
- School
- Community and Peers
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Mental Health
- Aggression
- Attitudes
- Skills (social/cognitive)
- Employment and Structured Free Time

It is a well-documented phenomenon in criminal justice and social science literature that correctional clients are generally less well-educated and have fewer marketable job skills than persons in the general population. Although the lack of employment by juvenile offenders is not considered to be a risk factor, services designed to improve the job-seeking abilities and employment opportunities of youth can provide protective factors that reduce the risk for reoffending. Providing juvenile probationers with the skills and opportunities associated with employment can discourage future delinquency and incarceration. The ability to maintain continuous employment correlates highly with reduced recidivism. Additionally, positive relationships with authority figures can promote a strong work ethic and provide pro-social models and supports. Currently, there are many juvenile probationers who are in need of interventions to secure and maintain employment.

In addition to reducing juvenile offenders' risk of recidivism, employment opportunities can also provide a means of financial stability and self-sufficiency, which are pro-social characteristics. A number of juvenile probationers and their families struggle with affording the extra expense associated with the youth's criminal justice involvement. Increasing job-seeking skills and facilitating employment experiences allows juvenile offenders the opportunity to contribute towards reducing this expense. Employment can assist juvenile offenders in meeting their court ordered obligations, including paying restitution, reimbursement and probation service fees. Work experience has also been shown to have a positive impact on adolescent development, including the establishment of time and money management skills, guidance in making more realistic career decisions, understanding employer expectations, and interacting effectively with co-workers.

Despite the significant social, economic and personal benefits of providing such services to justice-involved youth, many vocational and job-skills training programs (for example, Job Corps) do not permit participation by juvenile probationers. The Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services, therefore, was impelled to develop such an intervention program for juvenile probationers in Lake County that would address this important service area. Funding was secured through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority in the form of a Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG), which assisted the division in the development and implementation of the Youthful Offender Job Readiness Program. The primary program objectives are: 1) to sustain a job readiness training curriculum for juvenile probationers to build marketable skills, 2) to provide youth with employment opportunities, 3) support gainful employment that will allow juvenile probationers to meet some of their court ordered obligations (e.g., restitution, probation service fees, reimbursement), and 4) to participate in a positive activity which will improve juvenile probationers' social educational, and developmental functioning, thus reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

The goals of the Youthful Offender Job Readiness Program adhere with the mission, vision, and quality standards established for the Court as outlined in the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Strategic Plan (2009). The Strategic Plan of the Circuit Court of Lake County identifies and incorporates a number of diverse strategies based on those values that are important to the effective administration of justice. These strategic goals assure the Court that: 1) Decisions are based on the best interests of the public and the court system as a whole; 2) The business of the court is based on an underlying commitment to equal and timely justice and to public access to an independent forum for the resolution of disputes; and 3) The continued development of an accessible, independent court system is ensured through planning, research and evaluation of programs and through the use of modern management approaches and technological developments. The Job Readiness Program was developed with the following strategy areas in mind:

- Strategy C**      *Promote the expansion of and types of court services offered in the branch courts (and other sites) as a convenience and to improve accessibility by the public and the Bar.*
  
- Strategy I**      *Improve court forms and procedures to promote ease of use by judges, court staff, the public and the Bar.*
  
- Strategy J**      *Collaborate with stakeholders, ancillary justice agencies and private support providers to ensure that judges have sufficient information to make informed decisions.*
  
- Strategy K**      *Continually improve external communications, especially with the public, Bar, funding agencies and justice partners.*
  
- Strategy M**      *Continually improve court operations and service delivery of the judicial branch.*

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:**

The Youthful Offender Job Readiness Program evolved through a series of action steps, often taking advantage of existing resources, approaches, and community partnerships available to the Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services. These steps are outlined as follows:

- Needs Assessment; Research and Literature Reviews.
- Internal Evaluation of the FACE-IT Residential Program's Job Training Pilot Program.
- Developing Community Partnerships
- Curriculum Development
- Vocational Counseling of Juvenile Probationers
- Establishing and Maintaining Community Job Placement Sites

The Job Readiness Program is supervised by the Assistant Director of Juvenile Probation, who manages the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG), and assures that the program is adequately addressing its goals and objectives. A Juvenile Probation Officer and Juvenile Employment Specialist are responsible for the overall program coordination, including the evaluation of referrals, program evaluation and funding re-application. The Job Readiness Program relies on regular communication between program staff and the division's probation unit. Additionally, the Assistant Director maintains a close relationship with community partners to assure that the needs of the program and participants are being addressed.

The Job Readiness Program staff notifies the probation unit when program referrals are being accepted. Upon receipt of referrals, the program staff determines the eligibility and selects appropriate juvenile probationers to participate in the job training program. Program eligibility is limited to juvenile probationers 15-20 years of age who have probation service plans completed and have demonstrated appropriate maturity. The program staff contacts youth and their respective parent/guardian, and provides them with program details and start date information. Those accepting participation in the program are enrolled in the Curriculum Phase. In an effort to foster community partnerships and enhance participant accessibility to the program, a number of curriculum sites are used throughout Lake County.

The Curriculum Phase (or Phase One) is an eight-unit structured curriculum based on Dorothy Goble's (1992) workbook, *How to Get a Job and Keep It*. The workbook units and exercises provide a framework for the structured sessions: Unit 1) Planning to Get a Job; Unit 2) Finding a Job; Unit 3) Completing the Job Application Form; Unit 4) Interviewing for the Job; Unit 5) Taking Vocational Tests; Unit 6) Working on the Job; Unit 7) Succeeding at Your Job; and Unit 8) Changing You Job. Approximately eight participant sessions are held over a two-month period. Each session is approximately 2.5 hours in duration. In addition to the structured curriculum, participants also complete the Career Assessment Inventory, a vocational counseling assessment that can be used to reveal occupations that may be of likely interest to the participant, which is administered and reviewed by an in-house psychologist. Participants also demonstrate their job-readiness skills throughout the curriculum phase by engaging in mock interviews conducted by Juvenile Probation staff and community volunteers.

Upon completion of the Curriculum Phase, juvenile probationers will receive a Certificate of Completion and be assessed for transition into Phase Two, Job Placements. The program team assesses each participant for appropriate referrals to job interviews and employment placement. The participant's conduct while in the program and during their term of probation supervision are taken into consideration when deciding on an appropriate job site. Based on the results of the Career Assessment Inventory and screening by the program staff, juvenile probationers are matched according to their needs, geographic locations, and other characteristics with a contracted worksite, with participant wages covered for a temporary period with funds through the JABG. Once employed through the program, youth will receive periodic contact from the Juvenile Employment Specialist at their home or place of employment to follow-up on their individual progress.

#### **BALANCED SCORECARD OUTCOMES:**

The SMAART Performance Management Program of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit Court of Lake County is a process of organizational performance measures and continuous improvement efforts, which ensure that Court activities are aligned with the Court's strategic plan and are being conducted in an effective and efficient manner. The objective of the SMAART Performance Management Program is to improve the Court organization's capacity to monitor, manage, and enhance its services, programs and support activities. The Court organization has selected a number of outcome measures arranged in a Balanced Scorecard format which represent organizational effectiveness: **Project Management** (e.g., access to services, program outcomes, case processing, client satisfaction, public awareness), **Financial Management** (e.g., reducing client costs, reducing organizational costs, achieving projected budget, securing grant funding, client financial compliance), **Internal Process and Controls** (e.g., efficiency of service delivery, collaboration with justice partners, compliance with policies and procedures, adherence to ethical and professional standards, communications), and **Organizational Development &**

**Innovation** (e.g., job knowledge and skills development, utilization of technology, organizational commitment, problem-solving, responsiveness). The following scorecard measures were selected by the Job Readiness Project Team during the development and implementation of the program.



Of central importance to the implementation of the Youthful Offender Job Readiness Program was the securing of grant funding. The Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) funding allowed the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit Court’s Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services to accomplish the following program objectives:

- Provide a job skills program to a population that otherwise would not receive such services.
- Develop partnerships with community employers to take part in the development of youth.
- Enable youth to be successful on probation by complying with the orders of the court, including financial obligations to their victims and the justice system.
- Enable youth with the skills and opportunity to obtain employment beyond the grant.

During the course of the grant funding year, the program team facilitated the program curriculum on six occasions at various sites throughout Lake County. Altogether, sixty-nine youth participated in the Job Readiness Program. Of those who participated, forty-two youth successfully completed the curriculum portion, thus being eligible for employment placement. Twenty-five youth were employed during the

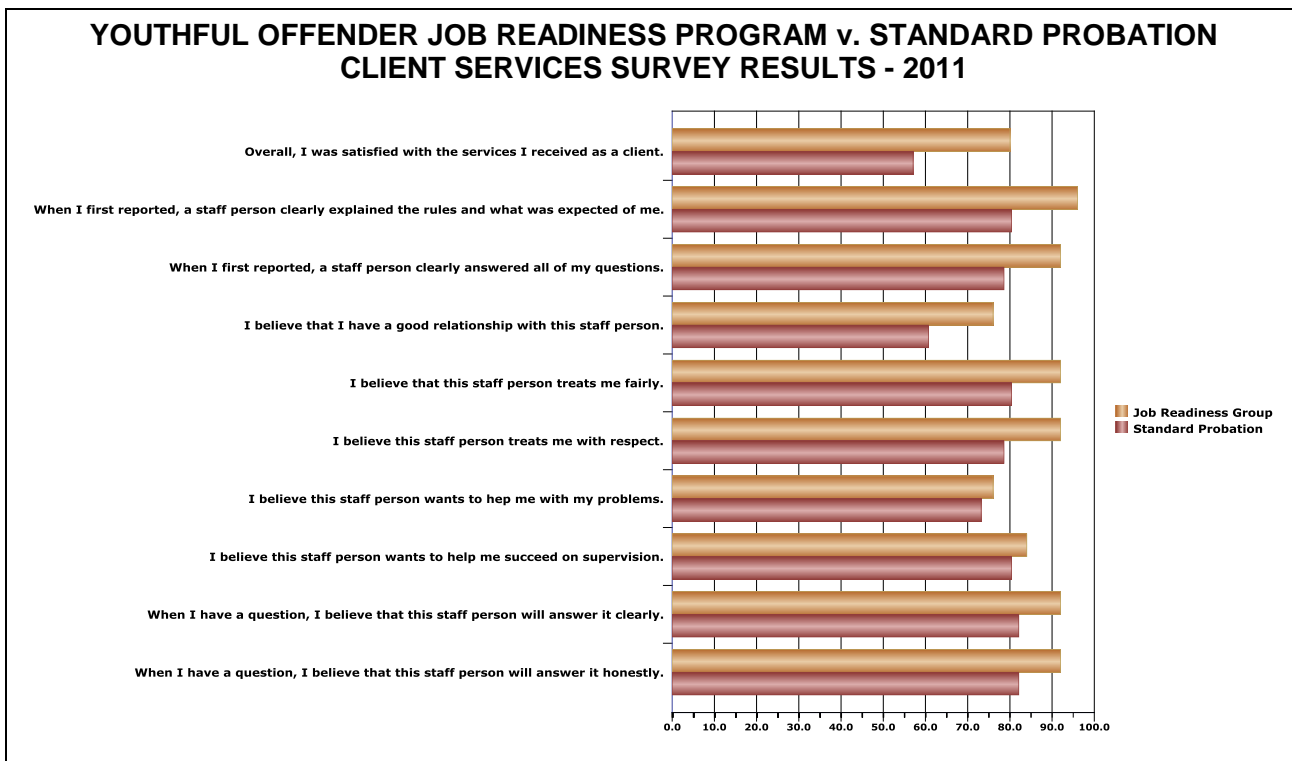
reporting period at grant-funded worksites. Among these supported worksites, the job program provided the Lake County Fielders Baseball Association with workers to maintain and operate their sports facility in preparation for scheduled games after experiencing an unexpected and significant loss in projected revenue. Similarly, eight juvenile probationers secured job opportunities in their respective communities after completing job applications and interviews for entry-level positions at local businesses. Those afforded with job opportunities through the program made a considerable amount of effort in securing permanent positions at their respective sites. Notably, two youth became permanent employees with a contracted worksite after successfully applying and interviewing for job openings soon after the temporary employment period. One additional youth was interviewed and is currently pending notification of his application for a permanent position at a contracted worksite. Eight program participants also secured independent employment outside of the contracted sites. A number of trained youth were unavailable for placement due to a conflict with their school schedules. Placement for these youth, therefore, will occur when time is available during the following grant funding period. Seventeen youth involved in the program had reoffended and were unable to accomplish the program expectations during the 2011 grant funding period.

<b>YOUTHFUL OFFENDER JOB READINESS PROGRAM Program Outcomes - 2011</b>	
Number of Youth Participating Phase 1	69
Number of Youth Successfully Completing Phase 1	42
Number of Youth Placed in Supported Employment Phase 2	25
Number of Youth Securing Employment – Post Program	11

Once employed, juvenile probationers were successful in maintaining employment within the employers' guidelines. Due to reduction in revenue and funding, businesses were more open to considering employment alternatives such as the Job Readiness Program. This opportunity allowed employers to sustain their operations while providing juvenile probationers with needed work experience. Employers maintained contact with the program team regularly and gave positive feedback. All employers have expressed a desire to continue participating in the program. One specific employment site, Lake County Department of Public Works, expanded into numerous site locations, allowing for an increase in placements throughout the county. Obtaining additional worksites has been an ongoing task of the program team and remains a primary focus. Additionally, given the current job market and general state of the economy, during this initial evaluation of the Job Readiness Program greater emphasis was placed on the minor's ability to secure employment than the payment of court fees and restitution.

Correctional clients' willingness to invest in the change process is considered to be a significant predictor of successful program outcomes and the perceived quality of the relationship between the client and program staff is considered a critical component of that process. Client dissatisfaction with this relationship is strongly correlated with resistance to the change process and, consequently, poor program outcomes. The most effective client/change agent relationships appear to be those that successfully balance aspects of procedural justice (e.g., firm, but fair and respectful) with a positive working alliance, effective communication techniques, and cognitive change strategies. Implementation of such varied and active engagement methods, often coupled with interactive skills training, are more likely than traditional methods (e.g., didactic lecturing) to increase program effectiveness and client satisfaction. In the absence of other indicators of success (e.g., long-term recidivism data), measuring offender satisfaction can offer insights into whether court staff are actively facilitating the change process and maximizing the ability of judicial clients to respond to change in a positive way. The chart below compares the satisfaction of Job Readiness Program participants with those of juvenile probationers assigned to standard probation. Generally, youth participating in the Job Readiness Program responded more favorably to program staff than youth assigned

to standard probation did to their assigned probation officer. This may indicate a greater level of investment in the program and its perceived benefits, compared to those associated with probation supervision.



The program has allowed youth not only to positively engage with division and program staff, but also to enter into collaborative relationships with community business leaders and other adult role models, creating positive experiences in the areas of job seeking and maintaining employment. Moreover, a number of participants have expressed in their open-ended survey comments a confidence in the program to help them well into adulthood, as well as an increase in their self-esteem in other areas of their lives (e.g., academic achievement). In particular, one Job Readiness Program participant was recognized by the Juvenile Officers Association (JOA) for the prestigious President’s Award. Recipients of this award must have made considerable improvements in their lives and be contributing members of society. The program staff nominated this juvenile probationer based on his accomplishments in work and school, as well as his service to the community.

For the program to experience such success in a short period of time a team approach was absolutely necessary. A number of complex tasks were performed: hiring a program specialist, marketing the program to peer professionals and potential employers, referral processing, screening for appropriate candidates, facilitation of the curriculum, seeking and securing employment sites, and providing support and feedback to the probationers who obtained employment through appropriate case management. The selection and training of a Juvenile Employment Specialist for appropriate program referral screening, facilitation of the curriculum and case management services was accomplished during the first half of the year. To increase and enhance the quality of the program, additional funding was requested and acquired through a supplemental grant. This additional funding enabled the program to develop new solutions and techniques in enhancing job readiness and skills to juvenile probationers. Through progressive outcomes in statistical reporting and positive reception from the criminal justice community, the Job Readiness Program has been continuously renewed for funding.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The outcomes associated with the Job Readiness Program have exceeded original expectations. The program has been greatly received for its credibility by stakeholders, including: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, Juvenile Court Judges, Court Administration, Juvenile Probation Unit, Juvenile Justice Council, clients and the community. Specifically, numerous juvenile probationers have been court ordered to participate in the Job Readiness Program as a condition of their sentence. Court fee payments (e.g., restitution, service fees and reimbursement) have increased through case management and follow-up. Further, the Job Readiness Program has been sustained by the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) statistical reporting and has been renewed for further implementation after positive audits. By establishing a program management team, internal communication has been enhanced. Additionally, by establishing policies and procedures, a program organizational structure has been realized. On a continuing basis, the program operations are evaluated and changes are made to improve service delivery and client / customer satisfaction.