
MINNESOTA BEST PRACTICES: Assisting Young Offenders in Re-Entering the Community

Agency: Ramsey County - Workforce Solutions
Service area: Ramsey County

Assisting young offenders and at-risk youth exiting the juvenile corrections system to effectively re-enter the community.

Overview of Program: The Building Lives Program provided employment and training services to reentry youth offenders. The overarching goal of the Building Lives Program was to assist youth offenders and at-risk youth in becoming productive, responsible, and law-abiding citizens by targeting youth, ages 16-24, who are transitioning from incarceration or a correctional facility back to the community.

Emphasis was placed on those youth who live inside of the Saint Paul Enterprise Community. The Building Lives Program, for the last two years, was a partnership between Workforce Solutions, HIRED and Boys Totem Town-Ramsey County Community Corrections.

Impact on Youth Offenders: Transitioning back to the community represents a significant challenge for youth offenders, many of who are returning to their same neighborhood, school and peer group. To address this challenge, youth participated in the development of a release plan to assist them in transitioning back into the community. Aftercare staff provided supervision of the youth and ensured compliance with the release plan for up to 90 days. For the short-term, there were some services available to youth offenders, as part of their aftercare release plan. However, there were three specific gaps in aftercare services that this project improved:

- 1) Coordinated access to services,
- 2) Improved level of services, and
- 3) Long-term follow through.

The Building Lives Program impacted positive outcomes in several ways:

First, The Building Lives Program used a Youth Development model to implement a comprehensive, strengths-based long-term plan that involves the numerous stakeholders in the youth's life. This planning of pro-social activities with both corrections staff and Building Lives staff led to coordinated access to service beyond what was available to corrections or Building Lives staff alone. Also, these services were supported well beyond the 90-days of aftercare because of continuing involvement with Building Lives.

Second, the level of services for youth was improved. In addition to structure, many of the youth offenders were low income and needed to obtain employment. Challenging

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this need for income and structure was the fact the youth offenders face four barriers to obtaining employment: age, work history, education, and offender status. The Building Lives Program emphasized employment preparation as vital to successful employment stability. In addition to employment, the Building Lives Program successfully connected youth with needed mental health and chemical dependency treatment services that helped them maintain employment.

Finally, Boys Totem Town aftercare ended after 90 days. The Building Lives program continued to provide service and support to these offenders improving their long-term outcomes, and making them better members of the community.

Impact on Community: Youth who are released from the Juvenile Correction System usually returned to the same community they lived in prior to their offense. Because of this trend, these youth automatically had an impact on their community, either positive or negative. Youth who participated in the Building Lives Program showed a significantly more positive impact on their community in two distinct ways: first, because these youth were receiving one-on-one case management services, which included directly addressing their social, employment and mental health needs, these youth attained and retained employment in their communities. Secondly, the youth who participated in the Building Lives Program had a lower rate of re-offending and returning to the corrections system.

Identification of Partners: The main partners for the Building Lives Program were Workforce Solutions, HIREd and Boys Totem Town-Ramsey County Community Corrections. This partnership was formed and resources were solicited from the U. S. Department of Labor. Working partnerships were also formed with Saint Paul Public Schools, area alternative schools, Ramsey County Community Human Services as well as community mental health and social service related agencies. All of these agencies contributed to the Building Lives Program by offering in-kind services and leveraging their individual streams of funding.

Ability to Replicate the Program: The Building Lives Program was a success, to a great extent, because it was able to address five reentry components to assist participants in becoming productive, responsible, and law-abiding citizens:

1. Achieving educational success
2. Engaging in pro-social youth development activities
3. Addressing their substance abuse and mental health needs
4. Developing attainable career and life plans and improving skills that reduce recidivism
5. Ensure compliance with aftercare programs, including residency placement

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The Building Lives Program was able to address these components because of its strong partnership between the Juvenile Corrections System and the service providers. The program utilized service providers that had a strong connection to the community that the youth was returning to. By using community service providers the program leveraged both local funding resource but also leveraged community support/buy-in that was critically important to the success of the program. When considering replication of this program all of these aspects of the program need to be considered.

For additional information, contact:

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