
MINNESOTA BEST PRACTICES: Serving Young Offenders - Youthbuild Model

Agency: Guadalupe Alternative Programs (GAP) YouthBuild Services
Service area: City of St. Paul

Assisting young offenders who have exited the juvenile corrections system or have ties to inner-city gangs, to effectively re-enter the community and become productive and responsible citizens.

Overview of Program: GAP's HOME (Helping Offenders in Minnesota Excel) Youthbuild Program provides employment and training services, support services, counseling/case management, leadership development, and job placement and follow-up services to youth offenders primarily on St. Paul's Westside. The goal of the HOME Youthbuild is to connect at-risk youth and young offenders to their community through attainment of their high school diploma, employment, and citizenship skills. The program targets youth, ages 16-24, who are transitioning from gangs or incarceration back into the community.

Impact on Youth Offenders: The challenge in providing aftercare services for youth offenders transitioning back into the community is to replace any negative influences with intensive and comprehensive training and support, daily contact with experienced staff who provide constant supervision and follow through.

As youth offenders enroll in the GAP Alternative School and HOME Youthbuild, counseling staff provide one-on-one case management and assessment to identify the individual youth offender's particular needs and develop a comprehensive plan that includes short and long term goals in academics, career exploration, work readiness and vocational skills training, leadership and life skills training, job placement, and post-program follow-up.

GAP programs specifically offered to assist youth offenders include:

Youth Lead

Youth Lead is a Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funded program aimed at developing pre-employment and job readiness skills, vocational training, and necessary support to obtain employment. Youth are also taught leadership skills, giving them the confidence and drive to seek and retain employment. This program is provided in partnership with Ramsey County Workforce Solutions and is funded under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

Aggression Replacement Training – Art®

Aggression Replacement Training is a 10-week, 30 hour curriculum that is designed to teach adolescents to understand and replace aggression and antisocial behavior with positive alternatives. There are three one hour sessions per week, each addressing a different component. The three components are: 1-Structured learning training: focusing on social skills; 2-Anger control training: focusing on self-control of anger and aggression; and 3-Moral reasoning: focusing on the values behind decision-making.

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Crossroads

Youth offenders on probation who are in most need are assigned to this program that builds an individualized success plan in a small group setting. Youth placed in Crossroads work together in a group covering topics such as: becoming responsible young men/women in society, relationships (among the group, with adults, with their peers, etc.), and maintaining these relationships in a healthy way to build support and accountability.

Cultural Leadership Activities

Throughout the year, youth offenders attend cultural activities at different locations throughout Minnesota that reinforce classroom and leadership skills. Two activities offered this year: a weekend at the Pipestone Quarry and the Three Fires Ceremony. These activities focus on teamwork, leadership development, and spiritual development. These leadership activities are considered extremely valuable for youth offenders as they build self-confidence, social skills, and conflict resolution skills.

Student Board

The Student Board is an after school program that sees a high participation rate from young offenders. The Student Board is directly involved in planning various cultural activities which GAP promotes in the community, including large celebrations of dia De Los Muertos and Cinco de Mayo. The Student Board provides more opportunities for offenders to sharpen their leadership skills.

Three Key Components Leading to Successful Outcomes:

Parents as Partners

The relationship between youth and their parents is vital for success. GAP staff makes regular contacts with families to ensure that parents/guardians are involved in their youth's learning and progress. Parents (or adult mentor/role model in the youth's life) are requested to come in twice a month to discuss their youth's progress with the counselor. Mentor/role models include foster parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and older siblings.

Staff and Youth Partnership

Positive, healthy relationships are emphasized between staff and youth. Staff devote as much one-on-one time to students as possible, act as youth advocates, and help youth identify what types of services and learning opportunities are the most beneficial to their success.

A Series of Successes

Success, both inside and out of the classroom, motivates youth offenders to continue to strive for success and to stay involved in positive, non-risky behavior. GAP has observed that once youth experience three to five consecutive successes, they are less likely to revert back to high-risk behaviors. Parent and staff constantly hold youth

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accountable, encouraging them to succeed. Youth do generally follow through with positive behavior and successes.

Impact on Community: Youth offenders enrolled in GAP's HOME Youthbuild reside on St. Paul's Westside, the neighborhood where they committed their offense(s). HOME Youthbuilders typically have a positive impact on their community through volunteer and community service in their immediate neighborhood; through visible renovation of affordable housing in the surrounding community; and subsequent employment in the community. Youth offenders who participated in Youthbuild had a lower rate of re-offending and returning to the corrections system (average re-offense rate of 5% for participants).

Identification of Partners: GAP's primary partners include: Argosy University (provides counseling and support services), Community Neighborhood Housing Service (CNHS) and Neighborhood Development Agency (NeDA) (provide housing project sites, construction materials, and Mentoring/job shadowing opportunities), Ramsey County Community Corrections (provides case management, offender supervision and support); Youth Lead is funded under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) through the Ramsey County Workforce Service Area.

Ability to Replicate the Program: Key program components that address the unique needs of young offenders include:

1. Educational support
2. Leadership and life skills training, development, and activities
3. Counseling and social skills training that address drug use, anger and aggressive behaviors, and mental health issues
4. Developing vocational skills, work readiness/maturity skills, and long term career and life goals
5. Intensive supervision and follow-up to ensure progress towards goals and placement in employment or post-secondary enrollment.

Questions:

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