



Performance-*based*  
Standards



## Staff Perceptions

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## Staff Perceptions

### *Introduction*

When young offenders are placed in secure residential facilities to receive the care and services they need to return to the community and not return to criminal behavior, the juvenile justice system expects that facility staff are well-trained, maintain safe and healthy environments and care about the youths. Research and experience show staff-youth relationships significantly impact youths' successful reentry yet the relationships are easily threatened by external influences such as staff turnover, facility closings, relocation of staff and youths, changing laws and regulations and punitive behavior management policies. Asking staff members about their perceptions, experiences and feelings working in facilities adds another critical level of understanding to what makes a facility successful or not in rehabilitating youths.

Performance-based Standards (PbS) is a national data-driven improvement model grounded in research that holds juvenile residential facilities to the highest standards of operations, programs and services. PbS sets national standards that establish the highest expectations in seven areas of facility management: safety, security, order, health/mental health, programming, reintegration and justice. PbS collects both quantitative and qualitative data from administrative forms, youth records, incident reports, exit interviews of youths and climate surveys of youths, staff and families. PbS trains and supports participants to collect data, analyze the results and change practices. PbS data undergoes a rigorous data quality assurance process and has established its reliability and validity over 18 years. The data indicates how well facilities meet PbS' standards and commitment to treating all youths in custody as one of our own. In 2004 PbS won the Innovation in American Government Award for uniquely and effectively addressing conditions of confinement.

PbS is unique among the standards and accreditation efforts in its surveys of youths, staff and families twice a year and reports summarizing the responses available within two weeks after the end of the data collection period. The PbS Staff Climate Survey includes 49 questions about staff safety, training, relationships with youths and families and general perceptions of fairness, security and programming. PbS facilities survey a minimum random sample of 30 staff and collect more than 8,000 surveys annually.



## Why Staff Perceptions Matter

Several recent research studies show staff perceptions influence facility culture and safety. The Pathways to Desistance study found that youths' generally good experiences in facilities, including relationships with staff, staff fairness and sense of safety impact facility safety and youths' recidivism.<sup>i</sup> Studies by the Vera Institute of Justice, Family Justice Program show staff relationships with families and youths impacts successful reentry.<sup>ii</sup>

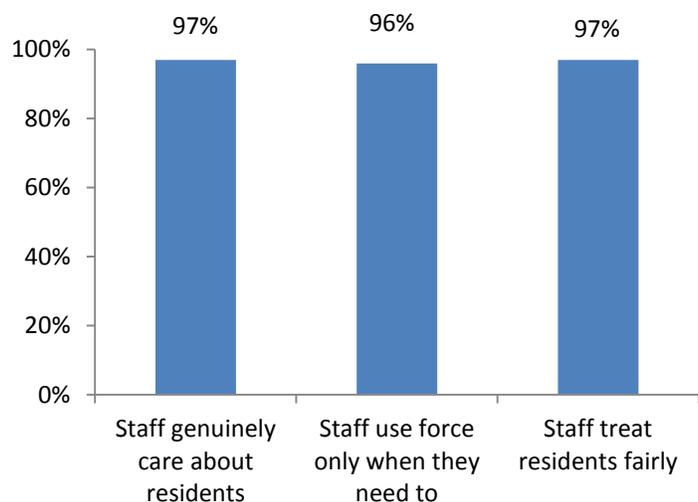
To help juvenile justice leaders answer the question of what is the ideal staff-youth ratio, Snyder and Kupchik<sup>iii</sup> conducted research using the PbS database and concluded that proper staff support and training are more important than the actual ratio for maintaining safety and found a linear relationship showing the more positive staff feel about their training and support, the more positive outcomes for youths and the reverse: more negative feelings by staff led to more negatives outcomes for youths. For example, the researchers reported that facilities with a large proportion of staff who feel supported by their supervisors tend to have low rates of sexual assault and staff are less likely to use physical restraints.

In October 2013, more than 4,000 staff from across the country completed the PbS Staff Climate Survey. Here's what staff in PbS facilities said:

*Staff have healthy, helpful and positive relationships with the youths.*

- Nearly all staff (97%) said staff genuinely care about residents, 96 percent said staff only use force only when they need to and 97 percent said staff treat residents fairly. A noticeable increase since October 2012 when 88 percent of staff said staff genuinely care about residents, 87 percent said staff only use force when necessary and 89 percent agreed that staff treat residents fairly.

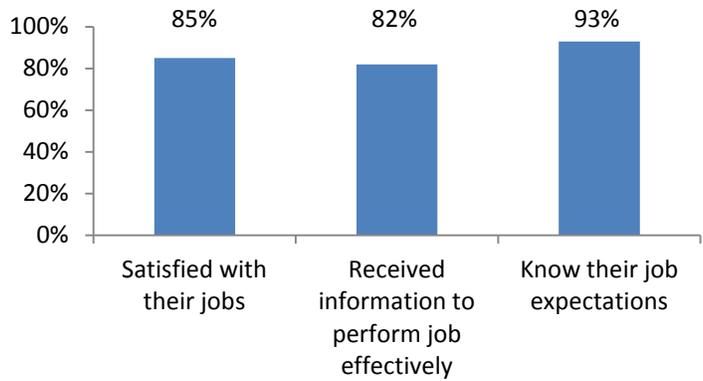
### Staff-youth Relationship



*Most are satisfied with their jobs.*

- The majority (85%) of staff said they are satisfied with their job, 82 percent said they received the information they need to perform their job effectively and 93 percent said they know their job expectations.

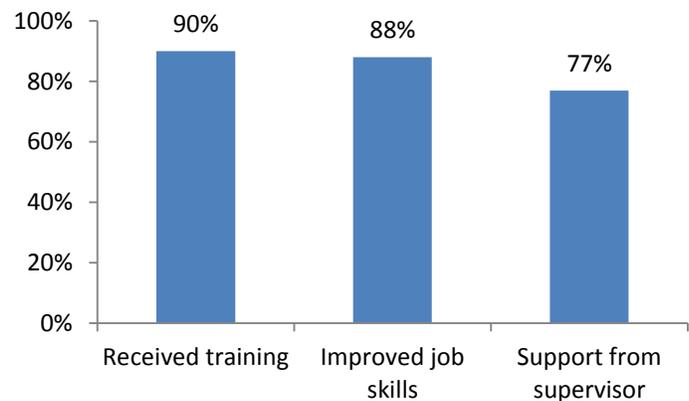
**Staff Satisfaction**



*Most said they received the training needed and felt supported by supervisors.*

- The majority (90%) of staff said they received the training they need to perform their jobs, 88 percent said the training improved their job skills and more than three quarters (77%) said the support and guidance they received from their supervisors was good or excellent.

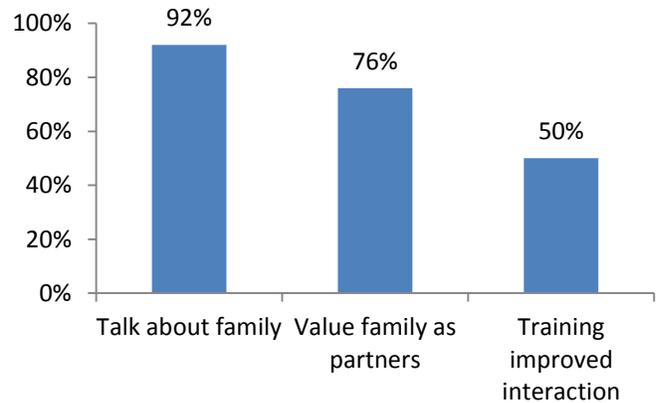
**Staff Training**



*Staff value youths' families.*

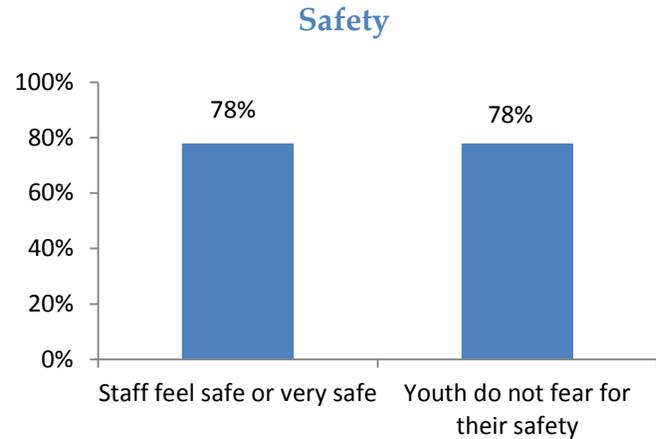
- Most staff (92%) talk to the youths about their families, 76 percent said they value family members and the youths' social supports as partners in their work with the youths and half (50%) said training improved the way they interact with families.

**Staff Value Families**



*Staff feel safe, so do youths.*

- More than three quarters of staff said their facilities were safe or very safe for them and they do not fear for their safety. Similarly, when youths were asked whether they feared for their safety at the facility within the last six months, 78 percent said they did not fear for their safety.



<sup>i</sup> Presented at the June 2012 National Institutes of Justice (NIJ) conference. For more information please visit: [www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu](http://www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu)

<sup>ii</sup> Agudelo, S. (2013). *The Impact of Family Visitation on Incarcerated Youth Behavior and School Performance*. New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice. Retrieved from [www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)

<sup>iii</sup> Kupchik, A. & Snyder, B. (2011). *Performance-based Standards for Youth Correction and Detention Facilities: 2011 Research Report*. Scottsdale, AZ: New Amsterdam Consulting, Inc.

## About PbS

*PbS was launched by the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) specifically to address safety, health and quality of life issues in youth facilities identified as problematic in the 1994 Conditions of Confinement Study. To address the issues, PbS established national standards for the highest quality facility operations, services and youths' daily experiences. PbS trains and supports participants to collect qualitative data – surveys of youths, staff and families - and quantitative administrative record and incident data and uses the information to implement reforms. Unlike other standards efforts, PbS focuses on using the information collected to promote best practices and on continually measuring facilities' safety, quality of life and services. In 2004, PbS won the Innovations in American Government Award for uniquely and effectively addressing conditions of confinement. PbS surveys youths, staff and families every April and October about conditions, safety, services, staff-youth relationships, contact with family, contact with lawyers and reentry preparedness. About 200 residential programs in 31 states and the District of Columbia participate in PbS, adhering to PbS' data quality requirements and sharing PbS' commitment. PbS believes that youths deserve to be treated as individuals with strengths and needs, within the context of their families, and PbS is committed to treating all youths in custody as one of our own as the best approach to rehabilitation. PbS provides national standards, outcome measures, a quality assurance process, training and technical assistance to all facilities and leaders to help implement research-based and best practices. For more information, please visit: [pbstandards.org](http://pbstandards.org).*

