



Performance-*based*  
Standards



## What Youths, Staff and Families Say about Community-based Programs

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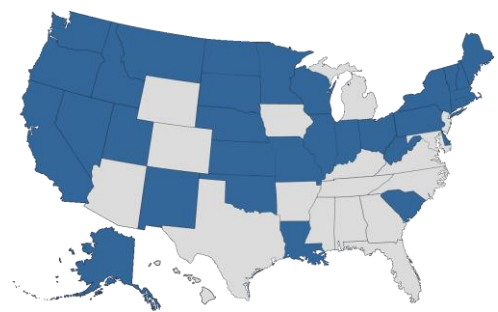
## What Youths, Staff and Families Say about Community-based Programs

### Introduction

Performance-based Standards (PbS) is a data-driven improvement model grounded in research that holds juvenile justice agencies, facilities and residential care providers to the highest standards for operations, programs and services. PbS was launched 20 years ago by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), US Department of Justice, to address the safety, health and quality of life issues reported in the 1994 Conditions of Confinement Study. Over time, PbS uniquely has established national standards to guide operations and uniform performance outcome measures to continuously, accurately and comprehensively monitor daily practices and cultures in youth facilities.

PbS for community-based programs was launched in 2008 to collect and report data showing the services and quality of life provided in traditionally smaller residential facilities located in the community to promote interaction with local agencies, supports and family. About one-third of the nearly 60,000 youths in residential placement in the United States are in community-based programs such as group homes and residential treatment centers, the vast majority of which are operated by private providers<sup>1</sup>. 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. PbS data gives both the private providers and public agencies contracting with them data and outcome measures that show how well the programs perform compared to national standards and similar community-based programs as well as a way to improve the services and quality of life in the program.

Youths and staff are surveyed every April and October, while families are surveyed on a continual basis. The surveys ask the youths, staff and families what they think about the conditions, safety, services, staff-youth relationships, contact with family, contact with lawyers and reentry preparedness. In the October 2014 collection, community-based programs collected 720 youth climate surveys, 1,130 staff climate surveys and 422 family climate surveys.



*PbS participants as of the October 2014 collection*

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<sup>1</sup> Sickmund M., Sladky, T.J., Kang, W. & Puzzanchera, C. (2013). "Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement." Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp>



## Aligning with Research

Research makes clear that youths’ experiences in residential facilities impacts the likelihood they will succeed when they return to the community as well as their behavior while confined.<sup>23</sup> Research looking at PbS climate survey questions asked of youths, staff and families and found two specific areas that contribute to youths’ positive behaviors: feeling safe and feeling the facility/ staff were fair.<sup>4</sup>

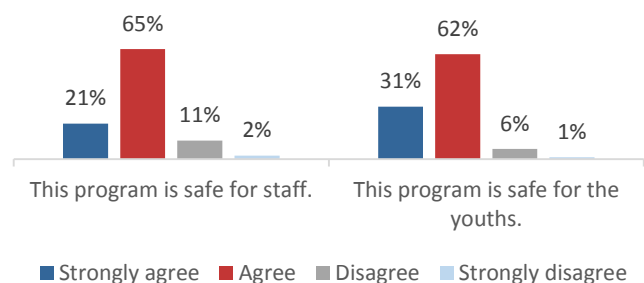
Research also has shown the significant impact positive connection to family and staff-youth relationships have on youths’ behavior while in custody as well as success when released. Families are the most frequent provider of housing and financial support, help secure jobs and assist with child care. Family involvement has been shown to result in better employment outcomes and reductions in the use of alcohol and other drugs.<sup>5</sup> While families support the youths while in custody and once they are released, staff have daily interactions with the youths and the staff-youth relationship is an important element to creating a safe and secure setting.<sup>6</sup>

## Feeling Safe

In the PbS community-based programs, most youths and staff do not fear for their safety and families do not fear for their child’s safety while he or she is at the program. In October 2014, one-quarter of the youths reported they fear for their safety, 14% of staff reported they fear for their safety and only 4% of the families reported they feel their child was not safe in the program. Related responses indicating perceptions of safety are:

- Over three-quarters of youths (77%) strongly agree or agree that staff use force only when required. A higher percentage of staff (90%) report the same.
- Overall, staff report that the program is safe for both youths and staff. However, staff believe that the program is safer for

*Table 1: Staff Perceptions of Safety*



<sup>2</sup> From recent analyses of the Pathways to Desistance Study. For more information please go to: [www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu](http://www.pathwaysstudy.pitt.edu). The Pathways studies also used some of the questions developed and used by PbS.

<sup>3</sup> Kupchik, A. & Snyder, B. (2011). Performance-based Standards for Youth Correction and Detention Facilities: 2011 Research Report. Scottsdale, AZ: New Amsterdam Consulting, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> diZerega, M. & Verdone, J. (2011). “Setting an Agenda for Family- Focused Justice Reform.” Vera Institute of Justice.

<sup>6</sup> Kupchik, A. & Snyder, B. Performance-based Standards 2011 Research.





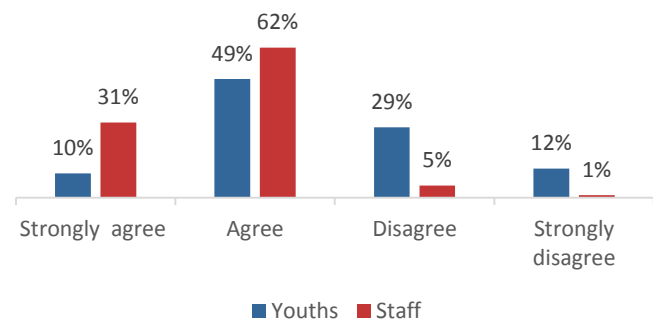
youths than it is for staff. (Please see Table 1: Staff Perceptions of Safety.)

- 10% of staff reported being injured by a youth and about one-third (32%) report being assaulted or threatened by a youth. These numbers have slightly decreased from the April collection when 13% of staff reported being injured by a youth and 38% reported being insulted or threatened by a youth.

## Fairness

- 59% of youths report that staff are fair about discipline issues. A larger percentage of staff (85%) report that staff member treat youths fairly.
- More staff than youths feel that the rules are fair: 59% of youths report that the rules at the program are fair for youths, whereas nearly all staff (93%) report the same. (Please see Table 2: Perceptions on Whether Rules are Fair for Youths.)

Table 2: Perceptions on Whether Rules are Fair for Youths

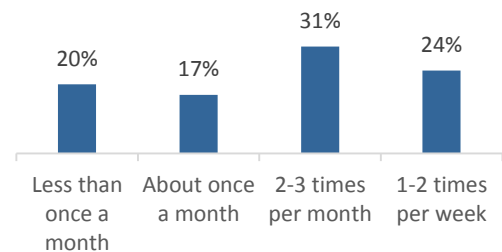


## Family

Nearly all family members knew how to stay in touch with their child and the majority have visited and called them during the youth’s stay at the program.

- Nearly all family members knew how to visit their child (99%) and almost three-quarters (74%) of youths report that a parent or guardian visited them at the program. (Please see Table 3: Frequency of Family Visits for family member’s report of how often they visited their child.)
- Likewise, nearly all family members knew how to call their child (98%) and 94% of youths report that they have talked on the phone with a parent or guardian. Nearly half (43%) of youths report talking on the phone 1-2 times per week, 19% report 3-4 times per week and 18% report 5 or more times per week.
- Additionally, almost three quarter (72%) of youths say that staff members are fair in applying the rules about telephone calls.

Table 3: Frequency of Family Visits

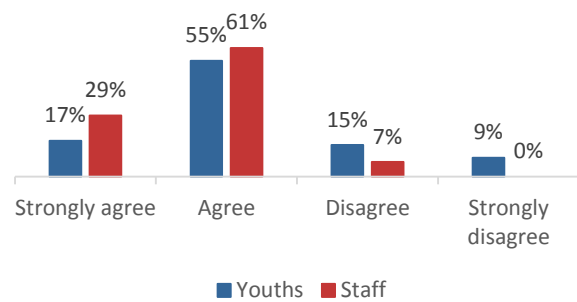


## Staff-Youth Relations

The majority of both youths and staff reported positive results regarding staff-youth relations. Staff generally reported the relationships to be more positive than the youths reported.

- 72% of youths report that staff genuinely care about youths, compared to 90% of staff. (Please see Table 4: Perceptions on Whether Staff Genuinely Care about Residents.)
- This staff-youth differential is also found in several other questions focusing on the staff-youth relationship; 62% of youths report that staff show residents respect compared to 88% of staff. Similarly, 63% of youths report that staff are good role models compared to 86% of staff.
- When youths and staff were asked whether staff give more positive comments than negative comments they were in more agreement; 69% of youths and 82% of staff agreed that staff were positive.

**Table 4: Perceptions on Whether Staff Genuinely Care about Youths/Residents**

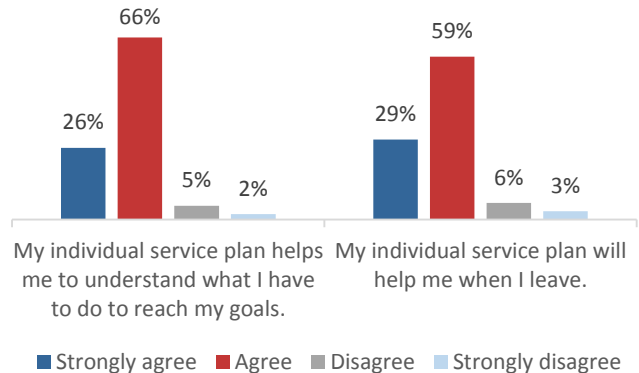


## Service/Treatment Plans

The majority of youths, staff and families report that they were able to give input into the youths' treatment/service plan and youths say the plan is helpful.

- 86% of family members reported that they participated in the development of their child's treatment plan. This decreased from the April collection where 93% reported that they participated.
- Similar to families, 88% of youths report that they were able to give opinions about their service plan goals.
- Only 75% of staff report being able to provide input into the creation and execution of youths' treatment/service plans.
- Youths report that the service plan helps them understand what they need to do to reach their goals (92%) and will help them when they leave (88%). (Please see Table 5: Youths' Perceptions on their Service Plan.)

**Table 5: Youths' Perceptions on their Service Plan**





## Quality of Programming and Care

The majority of youths and staff agree that the program's facility is in good condition and the services are helpful.

- Three-quarters of youths (75%) and 88% staff agree that the program's facility is clean.
- 81% of youths and 88% of staff agree that everything (showers, toilets, etc.) is in working order.
- Among both youths and staff, food was not as well-received; only 55% of youths and 68% staff agreed that the food was good. In addition, negative feelings toward the food were stronger for youths with 15% strongly disagreeing compared to 7% of staff.
- 87% of staff report that the programming (school, counseling and other programs) helps residents understand what they need to do to succeed when they return home.
- Staff report that the health services for youth are good (31% strongly agree, 59% agree, 5% disagree, 1% strongly disagree). Likewise, youths report that the medical care they received was helpful (24% strongly agree, 60% agree, 11% disagree, 4%strongly disagree).
- 78% of youths report that classes are helpful and 70% say their grade level has improved since being at the program. Nearly two-thirds (63%) have earned school credit.

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## PbS Issue Brief Series

*PbS recognizes that youths deserve to be treated as individuals with strengths and needs, within the context of their families. PbS is committed to treating all youths in custody as one of our own and providing 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: <http://pbstandards.org>.*

