



Family Data Snapshot

Kim Godfrey Lovett, Executive Director, and Brian O'Neal, Program Assistant

April 2020

Introduction

For about the last six years, the historic wall separating youths in juvenile justice facilities and residential placements from their families is slowly coming down. Thanks to research, innovative leaders and brave individuals, we are seeing more and more facility staff and families working together as partners and breaking down the old myths and misperceptions that kept the two groups at odds. And as we hoped, we are also seeing positive data supporting the new practices and approaches to family-facility relationships. The [Performance-based Standards \(PbS\) Learning Institute](#)¹ presents a snapshot of data reflecting some of the benefits of improving the relationships between facility staff and family members and increasing the connection of families to their children.

PbS began its work to improve facility-family relationships in 2014 with the launch of the Family-Youth Initiative (FYI) in collaboration with the Vera Institute of Justice, Family Justice Program. FYI was designed to lead, promote and guide a new wave of facility-family partnership. PbS developed national standards and performance measures for facility-family partnerships and integrated them into the existing PbS continuous improvement model, recognizing the importance of family alongside safety, security, services, programming and reentry. The PbS family data includes administrative information about visitation and rich survey information from youths, staff and families about the ease or difficulty of visiting, quality of communications and value of the facility-family relationship.

Findings

1. More youths feel safe in facilities where more staff report they value family members as partners.

Ensuring a facility is safe for those who live, work, volunteer and visit is the most important and most daunting responsibility for juvenile justice leaders. Perceptions and experiences of psychological and physical safety for youths provide the necessary foundation for effective learning and changing behaviors.

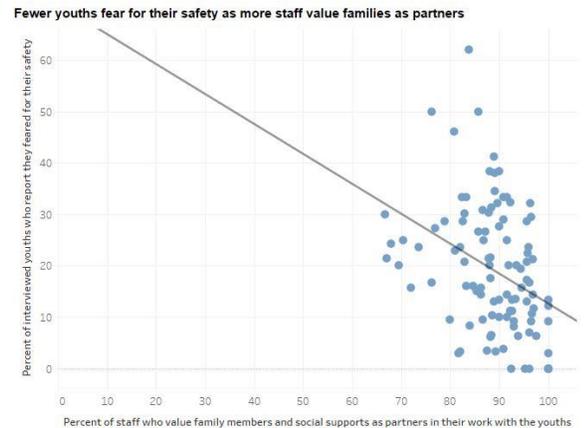
¹ PbS is a data-driven improvement model that challenges juvenile justice agencies to continually meet the highest standards for residential care of youths. Launched in 1995 by the US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), PbS sets national standards for safety, rehabilitation services, programming, reentry and family connection. PbS measures and monitors facility practices by collecting and reporting data from administrative records and survey responses from youths, staff and families to provide a holistic picture of the conditions and quality of life in residential facilities. PbS data highlights the practices that are effective in promoting youths' healthy maturation and identifies those that are not. PbS trains staff to use the information to change practices and support reforms implementing the adolescent development approach.



PbS measures youths' safety in a variety of ways including their family members' level of involvement and engagement with facility staff. Four outcome measures were found to have a significant relationship with youths' perceptions of their safety in October 2019²:

- Percent of youths who report they have had phone contact with parent or guardian
- Rate of contact between facility staff and youths' families in the last full month (including phone, email and/or visit)
- Percent of youths who report their family and staff generally get along with each other
- Percent of staff who report they value family members as partners in their work with the youths.

As the rate of contact and each of those perceptions increased within a facility, the percent of youths reporting they feared for their safety decreased. The data adds to earlier research findings that show the importance of family involvement in youth outcomes.



2. Family visitation is associated with fewer behavioral incidents and increased staff perceptions of safety³.

Georgetown University researchers using five years of PbS data investigated if facilities would be better served in their pursuit for facility safety and family engagement by amending policies to promote family visitation. Specifically, they measured how family visitation related to youth behavioral incidents and how behavioral incidents related to staff perceptions of safety. They found:

- When family visits increased, total incidents decreased; and
- When total incidents increased, more staff feared for their safety and their rating of the safety of the facility environment decreased.

They concluded:

"This is important given that incidents can erode correctional officers' perceptions of safety and contribute to their decisions to voluntarily leave their positions. Additionally, policies that promote family visitation are important because they are in line with family-centered care, which is a growing advocacy movement to include the family as key stakeholders in the youths' treatment program."

² PbS data is reported every April and October. In October 2019, 198 facilities in 36 states participated in PbS: 113 correction, 44 detention, 15 assessment and 26 community residential programs.

³ Mikytuck, Alyssa and Jennifer Woolard. (2020). Research Brief: Increased Family Visitation Leads to Fewer Incidents and Less Staff Fear. *PbS Learning Institute, Inc.* Braintree, MA.