

## RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE IN JUVENILE CORRECTIONS

### Embedding Research in a Large Scale Treatment Program

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In 1999, the Alabama State Legislature passed legislation which mandated that all juvenile sex offenders be treated. Prior to this, there was no systematic approach to the problem of juvenile sex offenders at the state level and almost no available services in the entire state. The legislature assigned responsibility for the task of treatment to the Alabama Division of Youth Services. However, without the professional resources to plan, develop and provide such services, the administration of DYS decided to partner with the flagship universities of the state and develop a systematic approach to respond to this legislative mandate.

The Accountability Based Sex Offender Program (ABSOP) was developed jointly by the Alabama Department of Youth Services, the School of Social Work at University of Alabama, and the Department of Psychology at Auburn University. This unique program was intended to serve as a model of a public-public partnership solving a social problem by combining the resources of the two flagship universities and the designated state agency with a legislative mandate to address the problem of juvenile sex offenders.

In this paper we will review the components of the ABSOP program which we believe are distinct and provide a blueprint which may have some generalizability to other states or local agencies. In addition, we will outline and present the data which have come to serve as the crucible for the process of development of the subsequent evolution of the state's response to juvenile sex offenders.

There were several premises upon which the ABSOP program was founded. The first of these was a requirement that the agency, DYS, hold the partnership to a standard of excellence. Unlike many state programs which were designed simply to get by, to appear to address a problem, the intent for this program was to develop a best practices model. To that end, the developers of the program determined at the outset to be guided by what were identified as best practices in the literature as the starting point and, in addition, to found the program on a comprehensive empirical basis. Thus, one of the program principles is that in every way that the program could be evaluated, it would

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be evaluated, and those evaluations would be meaningful in the sense that there would be no sacred cows. Any program element found to be empirically unsupported would not be allowed to simply continue through a process of inertia but would be held to a standard of demonstration of empirical effects.

The cornerstone of our assessment efforts involve a comprehensive pre and post evaluation of every boy referred to the program. In addition, a sample of non sex offending, delinquent boys was evaluated to serve a comparison sample. The basic assumptions of all our assessment services were that all assessment activities would serve to address clinical needs, basic research needs, and as a foundation for empirical evaluation of programs. So the assessment protocol was designed to accomplish three fundamental goals: 1) to provide a rich and accurate clinical assessment to facilitate and focus treatment services; 2) to allow for the development of a sound data base from which a comprehensive theoretical and practical research could be established; and 3) to allow for accurate and conceptually articulated assessment of outcomes. In the remainder of this presentation, these data, from over 700 boys, will be reviewed in reference to these three goals. In particular, the differences between juvenile sex offenders and a comparison sample of non sex offending juvenile delinquents will be outlined and the policy consequences of our analysis of these differences will be discussed. Also, how these data were used to discover iatrogenic effects of our program which led to fundamental redesign of the program will be delineated.

## **Top Ten Tips for Incorporating Specialized Treatment into Juvenile Correctional Settings**

Virginia Edwards Pirrello, PhD  
Janet G. Clarke-McLean, PhD

Vicarious Learning is the concept that people can learn through access to the learning experiences of others. In this workshop the presenters will provide participants with an opportunity for vicarious learning by sharing lessons learned from more than 30 combined years of experience working with juvenile offenders in secure correctional custody settings. Research on the evidence-based characteristics of effective programs in juvenile justice will be used as a framework for the presentation of The Top Ten Tips and related anecdotal illustrations. Particular attention will be paid to common challenges of merging therapeutic models into oft-times coercive correctional practices.