

## Protecting Safety, Saving Money

### *Multi-Systemic Therapy Can Benefit Nearly Half of Youth Sent to Residential Programs*

#### Executive Summary

More than 40 percent of delinquent youth in Maryland who are currently sent to residential programs can be better served by Multi-Systemic Therapy, a proven in-home treatment program. This is the finding of an unprecedented review of court records by Advocates for Children and Youth. The result is more than double the figure used by the Department of Juvenile Services in planning for future expansion. It is critical that the State use the proper eligibility criteria in order to maximize MST use, improve public safety and save money.

#### Background

Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) is a proven program for rehabilitating delinquent youth. For four-to-six months, youth receive intensive treatment in their homes. The entire family is involved along with other positive community supports such as neighbors and teachers. As a result, youth are much less likely to engage in future delinquent acts. The success rate greatly exceeds that of residential programs which frequently are unable to work with families or change the conditions to which youth return after release. MST is successful with high risk youth and is much less expensive than residential programs.

Juvenile Services Secretary Donald DeVore wants expansion of MST to be “the hallmark” of his administration. Following states that have significantly expanded their MST capacity, Secretary DeVore closed a residential program and used some of the savings to expand MST.<sup>1</sup>

This study examines how many youth in Maryland currently can benefit from MST.

#### Methodology

Advocates for Children and Youth looked at a random sample of youth sent to residential programs from Baltimore City between July 1, 2008 and

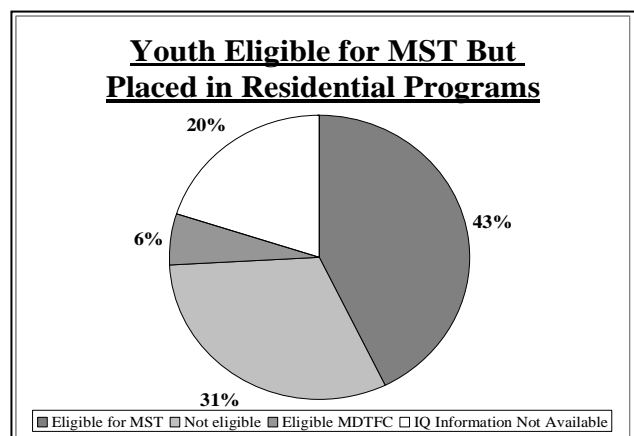
<sup>1</sup> See Advocates for Children and Youth, *Expanding Multi-Systemic Therapy Rapidly, Effectively and Affordably* (Jan. 2009).

September 30, 2008. The sample included 35 male and female youth who were awaiting placement. To determine eligibility for MST, ACY applied the criteria used by the Baltimore County MST program in reviewing referrals from the Department of Juvenile Services. ACY used court records to make determinations.<sup>2</sup> The criteria are:

- Between the ages of 11 and 17;
- IQ above 70;
- Lives with family or long-term foster family;
- Is not diagnosed with Autism or Pervasive Development Disorder;
- Psychiatrically stable, i.e., not in need of hospitalization; and
- Not referred because of a sexual offense without any other delinquent behaviors.

#### Findings

Of youth sent to residential placements, 43 percent met the criteria for MST. An additional 6 percent were eligible for Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care, a similar program used for youth who are unable to return to their homes. For 20 percent, there was no IQ data in the court file. Only 31 percent of youth were ineligible, as reflected in the chart below.



<sup>2</sup> ACY received access to the court records pursuant to a court order that guaranteed confidentiality. ACY examined the petition, court orders, pre-disposition investigation reports, evaluations, placement and treatment histories, progress reports and other resources within the juvenile court files.

When looking beneath the statistics, the court records reveal that many youth and their families were perfect candidates for MST.

**Josiah<sup>3</sup>**

A 14-year old youth is found delinquent for trespassing. He resides with his father and mother. He meets all of the criteria for Multi-Systemic Therapy, but he is placed in a group home.

**Discussion**

It is not surprising that all of these youth ended up in residential programs rather than being treated with MST. At the time the youth were awaiting placement, the Department funded no MST services in Baltimore City. Soon, the Department will be creating 80 slots of MST.

A critical issue is whether these new slots are sufficient to serve the need. This depends entirely on how many youth are deemed eligible.

The Department of Juvenile Services is using a much lower figure when calculating its need for MST. It says that only 20 percent of youth either in group homes or awaiting group home placement needs any of the three evidence-based practices. As Advocates for Children and Youth explained recently in *Juvenile Gaps*, the Department made several mistakes in calculating the need. In particular, the Department used a pre-placement instrument for youth already in group homes. As a result, many youth who could be served with MST were excluded.<sup>4</sup>

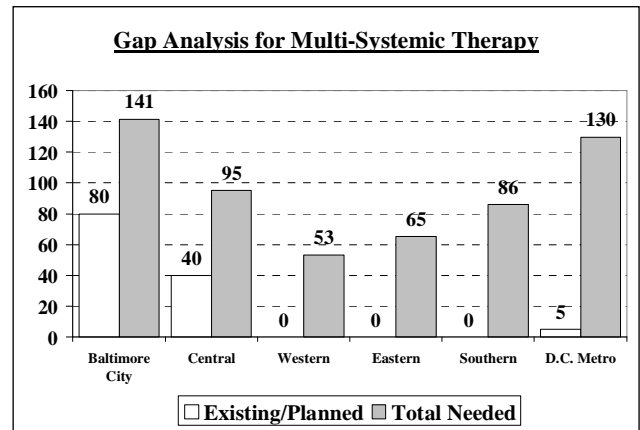
The examination of youth based on their pre-placement status and using MST-specific criteria yields a far more reliable result.

The implications are significant. The Department has concluded that it will have a surplus of MST spots statewide. However, with 43 percent of youth eligible for MST, there is actually a significant deficit of 445 slots.

Fortunately, expanding MST not only improves public safety, it also saves money by avoiding unnecessary and costly residential placements. For

every \$1 spent on MST, the State saves \$1.20 during the same 12-month period.<sup>5</sup>

As shown below, there are significant MST gaps in every region of the State.



This does not include youth who may be eligible for MST but for whom there was insufficient information.

MST is also useful for youth before residential placement may be required and after youth return from placement. Also, with some enhancements, it can serve youth who have significant mental health needs.

**Recommendations**

1. Recalculate the need for Multi-Systemic Therapy based on pre-placement examination using MST-specific criteria, and consider the needs of each region separately.
2. Ensure that information is gathered for all youth for all the MST criteria prior to a residential placement.
3. Develop and implement a plan for expanding MST to meet the full need within no more than two years.
4. Adjust the need for residential beds in each region based on the expanded eligibility for MST and other evidence-based services.
5. Consider MST for youth before residential placement is needed, after residential placement and, with enhancement, for youth who have mental health needs.

<sup>3</sup> Name changed to preserve confidentiality. See Appendix for details on the youth examined.

<sup>4</sup> See Advocates for Children and Youth, *Juvenile Gaps* (March 2009). At the time, ACY had only preliminary findings from its review of court records.

<sup>5</sup> Advocates for Children and Youth, *Pay for Itself* (Dec. 2008).

**Appendix**

	Eligible			Comments	Placement
	Yes	No	Unclear		
1	✓				In State Secure Facility
2	✓				Out of State
3	✓				Group Home
4	✓				In State Maximum Security Facility
5	✓				Residential/Substance Abuse Center
6	✓				In State Secure Facility
7	✓				In State Secure Facility
8	✓				Group Home
9	✓				Residential Treatment Center
10		✓		Does not meet Age criterion	Group Home
11			✓	Refused IQ testing	Residential/ Substance Abuse Center
12			✓	No IQ evaluation recorded on file	Residential / Substance Abuse Center
13		✓		Does not meet Age criterion	In State Secure Facility
14		✓		Not eligible due to mental health issues	Psychiatric Treatment Facility
15			✓	No IQ evaluation recorded on file	Group Home
16			✓	No IQ evaluation recorded on file	In State Secure Facility
17		✓		Does not meet IQ criterion	Out of State
18			✓	No IQ evaluation recorded on file	Residential/ Substance Abuse Center
19		✓		Not eligible due to mental health issues	Residential Treatment Center
20		✓		Not eligible due to poor family relations; suitable for MTFC	Therapeutic Group Home
21		✓		Not eligible due to poor family relations; suitable for MTFC	Group Home
22		✓		Does not meet IQ criterion	Residential Treatment Center
23		✓		Does not meet IQ criterion	Residential Treatment Center
24		✓		Not eligible due to nature of charge	Residential Treatment Center
25		✓		Not eligible due to mental health issues	Out of State
26		✓		Does not meet IQ and Age criteria	Residential Treatment Center
27			✓	No IQ evaluation recorded on file	Group Home
28	✓				Group Home
29	✓				Therapeutic Group Home
30	✓				Out of State
31	✓				In State Independent Living Program
32			✓	No IQ evaluation recorded on file	Group Home
33	✓				Residential/Substance Abuse Center
34	✓				Youth Center
35		✓		Does not meet IQ criterion	Residential/Substance Abuse Center