

Protecting Safety, Saving Money—Prince George's County

Multi-Systemic Therapy Can Benefit More Than Half of Youth Sent to Residential Programs

Executive Summary

More than 50 percent of delinquent youth currently placed in residential programs by Prince George's County Juvenile Court are better served by Multi-Systemic Therapy, a proven in-home treatment program. This is the finding of an unprecedented review of juvenile court records by Advocates for Children and Youth. There is a need for 63 slots, but there are only 5 in Prince George's County. MST reduces delinquency and saves money, and the State should expand the program to meet the full need in every jurisdiction. Prince George's County should receive priority for additional funds included in the Governor's proposed budget for expanding MST.

Background

Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) is a proven program for rehabilitating high-risk delinquent youth. For four to six months, a trained counselor provides the youth and his or her family with intensive services and skills to address the causes of delinquent behavior. The keys to the program's success are its home-based service delivery and holistic approach that includes parents or guardians, siblings, other family members, teachers, neighbors, and additional community supports. 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. Also, MST 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 in the Baltimore metropolitan area.¹

¹ See Advocates for Children and Youth, *Expanding Multi-Systemic Therapy Rapidly, Effectively and Affordably* (Jan. 2009). Also, the Department is working with the Innovations Institute, a University of Maryland

This study examines how many youth in Prince George's County can benefit from MST and then compares it to the current availability.

Methodology

Advocates for Children and Youth looked at a random sample of youth who were awaiting placement and sent to residential programs by Prince George's County Juvenile Court between July 1, 2008, and October 31, 2008. The sample included 35 male and female youth.² To determine eligibility for MST, ACY applied the criteria used by a licensed MST provider that receives referrals from the Department of Juvenile Services. ACY used documents contained in the juvenile court file to make its determinations.³ 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.⁴

entity that is tasked with helping the State expand and sustain evidence-based practices in Maryland.

² The sample size was based on the average pending placement population for the Cheltenham Youth Facility and Waxter Children's Center for this time period.

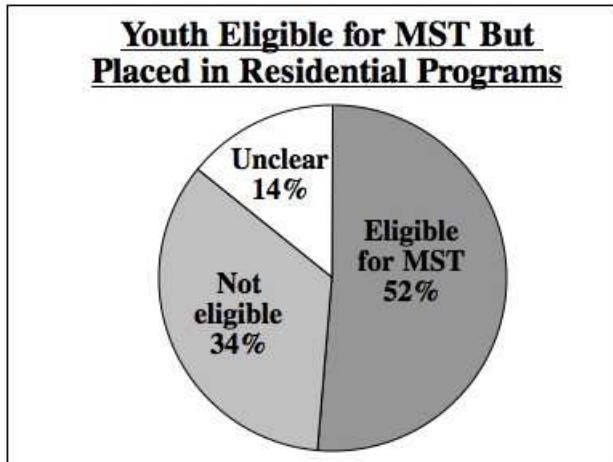
³ ACY received access to the court records pursuant to a court order that guaranteed confidentiality. ACY examined the petition, court orders, pre-disposition investigation reports, evaluations, placement and treatment histories, progress reports and other resources within the juvenile court files.

⁴ The criteria listed are those considered by the MST provider after receiving a referral from DJS. Prior to making a referral for MST, DJS considers a youth's Maryland Community and Assessment Service Planning score, Family Assessment score, and MST criteria. The Department does not refer youth in foster care, youth needing placement in hardware or staff-secure facilities, or youth requiring treatment in residential treatment centers.

Appendix

Findings

Of youth sent to residential placements, 52 percent met all criteria for MST.⁵ Fourteen percent were ineligible or not clearly eligible, because the parent did not want the child to remain in the home or indicated that they thought the child would benefit from residential treatment. It is unclear whether parents would have changed their minds and been willing to have the child remain in the home if given the intensive services and support of MST. Because MST requires parents or guardians to be actively engaged in the treatment process, a parent's strong desire to have the child removed from the home prevents the child and family from receiving MST. In such cases, Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care, a similar program used for youth who are unable to return to their homes, may be more appropriate. Only 34 percent of youth were completely ineligible, as reflected in the chart below.



Discussion

With 52 percent of youth meeting the criteria for MST, there is a need for 63 slots. The Department of Juvenile Services currently funds only 5 MST slots in Prince George's County.⁶ As such, there is a deficit of 58 slots.⁷

⁵ Where there was no IQ data in the court file, a local MST provider suggested that collateral information could be used to determine eligibility and that the absence of IQ data does not preclude youth from receiving MST. Interview with Community Counseling and Mentoring Services (Jan. 7, 2010).

⁶ Maryland's FY2011 budget includes nearly \$7 million for evidence-based practices, an increase from FY2010 that reflects preliminary plans to add about 20 MST slots in Prince George's County.

⁷ The actual need is based on 52 percent eligibility for Prince George's County youth admitted to all residential committed programs.

Case Study—Jonathan⁸

Jonathan is a 17-year old whose offense arose from taking his family's car. When evaluated by a local service provider, staff recommended that Jonathan participate in an out-patient drug treatment program, enroll in a GED program, and obtain employment. The Department of Juvenile Services' Pre-Disposition Investigative Report recommended an indefinite period of supervised probation with the youth enrolling in an educational or vocational program, securing employment, and paying restitution if ordered. Jonathan resides in Prince George's County and lives with his parents. Despite recommendations that Jonathan could remain in his home and receive effective services, he was committed to a residential substance abuse program.

Miscalculated Need

The Department has failed to recognize the unmet need in Prince George's County for two main reasons. First, the Department miscalculated the overall need statewide. Second, the Department did not take into account the needs of each individual jurisdictions, assuming that the slots anywhere in the State would be available for youth in Prince George's County.

In its initial calculation of MST need, the Department inappropriately used an assessment instrument from Washington State.⁹ The Department used the instrument to determine MST eligibility of youth already in group homes for several months. These youth unsurprisingly lacked existing connections to adults in the community and therefore scored poorly. However, the Washington instrument is meant for youth *prior to placement* and to determine which evidence-based intervention a youth should receive at disposition, not whether a youth should be placed in a facility, as DJS used it. As such, the Department underestimated the percentage of youth who could benefit from MST.

The Department also compared the need and supply statewide without considering the location of the MST services. However, MST is provided in a

⁸ Name changed to preserve confidentiality. See Appendix for details on the youth examined.

⁹ See Advocates for Children and Youth, *Juvenile Gaps: Agency Miscalculates Need for Community and Residential Services* (Mar. 2009).

Appendix

youth's home by local community-based providers. MST slots in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area cannot be utilized by youth and families in Prince George's County.

Consequences of Lack of MST

One result of the shortage of MST in Prince George's County is the extensive use of short-term incarceration to address delinquency. More than 25 percent of the sample was committed to the Re-Direct Program, a short-term program located on the grounds of the Cheltenham Youth Facility. There is no evidence that such a program is effective. Research clearly shows that unless there is an imminent threat to safety, a two-month incarceration is not only expensive, but that it has no advantage over probation and often increases future involvement with the juvenile and criminal systems, exacerbates mental health issues, interferes with school and reduces opportunities for successful employment.¹⁰

Overall Benefits of MST

MST offers a lower-cost, highly effective alternative to institutional placement. DJS budgets approximately \$10,000 per youth receiving MST.¹¹ On the contrary, residential placements range in costs from \$60,000 to \$100,000 per youth, with some out-of-state placements costing nearly \$200,000 per year.

In addition, evaluations of MST have shown significantly improved family functioning and school performance, decreased substance abuse and psychiatric symptoms, and reduced long-term rates of arrest and out-of-home placement. Some jurisdictions have seen as much as a 70 percent reduction in long-term arrests when youth receive MST.¹² On the other hand, 57 percent of youth

exiting Maryland's committed placements are re-arrested within one year of release.¹³

Also, cost-benefit analyses show that for every \$1 spent on MST, the State can save \$1.20 during the same 12-month period.¹⁴

Furthermore, the current MST provider in Prince George's County that receives referrals from DJS has had substantial success with its services.¹⁵ The provider has achieved nearly a 90 percent success rate on three indicators identified by the Governor's Office: percent of youth living at home, percent of youth in school or working, and percent of youth with no new arrests.

Recommendations

1. Prioritize Prince George's County for additional funds included in the Governor's proposed budget for expanding MST.
2. Recalculate the need for Multi-Systemic Therapy based on pre-placement examination using MST-specific criteria, and consider the needs of each county or region separately.
3. Determine if each youth referred for residential placement is an appropriate candidate for Multi-Systemic Therapy. For youth ineligible for MST because of poor family relationships, consider the youth and family for Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care.
4. Develop and implement a plan for expanding MST to meet the full need in Prince George's County and having the services on-line within the next two years.
5. Consider MST for youth before residential placement is needed, after residential placement and, with enhancement, for youth who have mental health needs.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of short-term incarceration in programs such as Re-Direct and make data-driven decisions about such programs.

¹⁰ Models for Change, *Research on Pathways to Desistance* (Dec. 2009); Barry Holman & Jason Zeidenberg, *The Dangers of Detention: the Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities* (Justice Policy Institute 2007).

¹¹ See Baltimore County, *Maryland Opportunity Compact to Provide Multi-Systemic Therapy* (2008).

¹² Maryland Disability Law Center, *Evidence-Based Practices for Delinquent Youth with Mental Illness in Maryland: Medicaid Must Cover These Effective Services* (Jan. 2007)

¹³ Maryland Department of Legislative Services, *Analysis of Maryland Department of Juvenile Services Operating Budget* (2009).

¹⁴ Advocates for Children and Youth, *Pay for Itself* (Dec. 2008).

¹⁵ StateStat Report, Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (Dec. 2009).

Appendix

	Eligible			Comments	Placement	Offenses at Adjudication
	Yes	No	Unclear			
1			✓	Evaluation recommends residential treatment with wraparound, intensive services	Residential Treatment Center	Assault 2 nd Degree/ Destruction of Property Under \$500
2	✓				Secure In-State	Driving While Impaired- Alcohol.
3		✓		Does not meet IQ criterion	Redirect	Robbery with a Dangerous Weapon
4	✓				Redirect	Burglary 3 rd Degree Dwell / Storehouse
5	✓				Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Unauthorized Use of Motor Vehicle / Livestock
6		✓		Family indicated youth is better off in placement and is a threat to self and community	Out-of-State	2 nd degree Burglary
7		✓		Family moved youth out of the home	Group Home	Arson- Statutory Burning 2 nd degree / Reckless Endangerment
8	✓				Secure In-State	Motor Vehicle Theft
9	✓				Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Trespass on Private Property
10		✓		Does not meet age criterion	Redirect	Destruction of Property under \$500
11	✓				Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Robbery
12	✓				Group Home	4 th Degree Breaking and Entering
13		✓		Does not meet residency requirement	Secure In-State	Motor Vehicle Theft
14		✓		Does not meet residency requirement	Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Unauthorized Use of MV/ Livestock
15		✓		Does not meet residency requirement	Secure In-State	Unauthorized Use of MV / Livestock
16		✓		Sex offense	Psychiatric Treatment Facility	Sex Offense 3 rd Degree
17	✓				Group Home	Robbery with Deadly Weapon
18	✓				Secure In-State	Robbery with Deadly Weapon
19	✓				Redirect	Unauthorized use of MV / Livestock
20	✓				Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Theft over \$500
21	✓				Redirect	Destruction of Property under \$500
22	✓				Group Home	Assault 2 nd Degree
23			✓	Parent believes youth needs drug treatment and structure	Group Home	Disorderly Conduct
24			✓	Prior commitment to a residential treatment center	Redirect	Burglary 4 th Degree
25	✓				Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Wearing Handgun under Influence of Alcohol / Drugs
26		✓		Does not meet age criteria	Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	False Statement – id, address, DOB
27			✓	Parent does not want youth unless given treatment	Group Home	Assault 2 nd Degree
28	✓				Redirect	Theft Under \$500
29		✓		Does not live with biological or long-term foster family	Residential Treatment Center	Disorderly Conduct
30	✓				Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Motor Vehicle Theft
31		✓		Does not meet residency requirement	Group Home	Burglary 4 th Degree
32			✓	Parent thinks youth needs in-patient treatment	Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Destruction of Property Under \$500
33		✓		Does not meet residency requirement	Redirect	Assault 2 nd Degree
34	✓				Residential Substance Abuse Treatment	Carry Deadly Weapon on School Property (knife)
35	✓				Redirect	Robbery
Total	18	12	5			