



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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The 8% Solution

The prevalence of serious juvenile delinquency could be reduced significantly by identifying and treating the small percentage of juveniles who are at risk of becoming chronic offenders when they first come into contact with the juvenile justice system. This Fact Sheet describes the California 8% Solution study and the 8% Early Intervention Program, which assesses the needs of and provides treatment services to these youth.

*The 8% Solution: Preventing Serious, Repeat Juvenile Crime*¹ describes efforts begun by the Orange County (CA) Probation Department in the latter part of the 1980s to “make a dent in the long-term crime problem” by focusing its resources in the most effective way. The Probation Department’s research staff tracked two groups of first-time offenders for 3 years and found that a small percentage (8 percent) of the juveniles were arrested repeatedly (a minimum of four times within a 3-year period) and were responsible for 55 percent of repeat cases.

The characteristics of this group of repeat offenders (referred to as “the 8% problem”) were dramatically different from those who were arrested only once. These differences did not develop after exposure to the juvenile justice system, as some might expect; they were evident at first arrest and referral to juvenile court, and they worsened if nothing was done to alleviate the youth’s problems. Unfortunately, in wanting to “give a break” to first-time offenders, the juvenile justice system often pays scant attention to those at greatest risk of becoming chronic offenders until they have established a record of repeated serious offending.

The good news is that most of the small group of potentially serious, chronic offenders can be identified reliably at first contact with the juvenile justice system. The “8%” offenders enter the system with a complex set of problems or risk factors, which the study identified as (1) involvement in crime at an early age and (2) a multiproblem profile including significant family problems (abuse, neglect, criminal family members, and/or a lack of parental supervision and control), problems at school (truancy, failing more than one course, or a recent suspension or expulsion), drug and alcohol abuse, and behaviors such as gang involvement, running away, and stealing.

A Demonstration Program

Armed with the study’s results, Orange County created its 8% Early Intervention Program to serve first-time offenders who were no older than 15½ and who exhibited at least three of the four risk factors in the multiproblem profile. The program focuses on high-risk youth and their entire families. Its goals are to increase structure, supervision, and support for families; make potential “8-percenters” accountable; ensure that youth and families understand the importance of school; and promote prosocial values, behavior, and relationships. The program also works to develop intervention strategies and services for youth in the community and to instill a strong commitment to teamwork by all partners, including representatives from other youth-serving agencies.

The program’s pilot phase began in July 1994 with youth from Anaheim and Buena Park in northern Orange County but offered only limited assistance from outside agencies. Since June 1998, full services for youth and their families, augmented by State funds through California’s legislatively established Repeat Offender Prevention Program (ROPP), have been provided through a collaborative team of public and private agencies. These services were provided first at the North Orange County Youth and Family Resource Center in Anaheim. By early 1999, four additional Youth and Family Resource Centers had opened in Orange County: a second site adjacent to the first one in Anaheim but tailored for older youth under the State-funded 8% Challenge Program; a central site in Santa Ana; a western site in Westminster; and a southern site in Aliso Viejo.

Services

Probation officers identify cases that are appropriate for the program and refer them to the Youth and Family Resource Centers. At the centers, agencies collaborate as a team to assess a youth’s needs and devise a case planning strategy. Together, the partners provide:

- ◆ An onsite school for students in junior and senior high school.
- ◆ Transportation to and from home.
- ◆ Counseling for drug and alcohol abuse.

¹ M. Schumacher and G.A. Kurz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.), 1999. Available from www.sagepub.com.

- ◆ Mental health evaluations and followup services.
- ◆ Health screenings (northern center only) and health education.
- ◆ Employment preparation and job placement services.
- ◆ Afternoon programs, including recreation, life-skills classes, study hall, and community service projects.
- ◆ At-home, intensive family counseling for families that can benefit from it.
- ◆ Intermittent evening classes for the whole family, such as parenting classes.
- ◆ Saturday community service activities twice a month.

Evaluation

A 5-year evaluation of the demonstration program, funded through ROPP, is under way. Some preliminary conclusions have been reached, including the following:

- ◆ The number of chronic juvenile recidivists can be reduced through a coordinated program of aggressive early intervention and treatment of high-risk youth and families.
- ◆ Significant risk factors are often overlooked at key points in the juvenile justice system because of a lack of critical information.

- ◆ Cooperative, concerted efforts to empower families can pay major dividends.
- ◆ Even a modest reduction in recidivism rates for the 8% problem group could result in major, long-term savings.

Final evaluation results for Orange County and the statewide ROPP project are expected to be available in fall 2002.

Conclusion

There will never be sufficient resources to deflect all juvenile delinquents from a pattern of offending. It is essential, instead, to focus intervention efforts where the need and the potential benefits are the greatest. Such a concentration of efforts may lead to a solution of the 8% problem and have a meaningful impact on community safety and on the future of many youth who might otherwise persist in lives of crime and violence.

For Further Information

More detailed statistical information on the 8% Solution can be found on the Orange County Probation Department Web site at www.oc.ca.gov/probation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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