



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

Office of the Assistant Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20531

January 21, 2016

Dear Colleague:

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), through its research component, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), seeks to better understand the range of responses and strategies that address the needs of justice-involved young adults. Young adults aged 18-24 account for a disproportionately high percentage of arrests and prison admissions. About half of them return to prison within three years following release. Recent research confirms that the region of the human brain that regulates impulse control and reasoning continues to develop well into a person's 20s. Other psychosocial capacities develop even later. Because of these factors, young adults are more likely to engage in risk-seeking behavior, have difficulty moderating their responses in emotionally charged situations, or lack a fully developed future-oriented method of decision-making. However, because of the rapid development that occurs during this period of time, the brain is more malleable to appropriate intervention. Therefore, we see the opportunity to reduce future criminal activity—and consequently the number of future victims—by having a justice system that responds to criminal behavior in a developmentally-appropriate manner and helps young adults rebuild their lives.

NIJ has contracted with an independent consultant to conduct an environmental scan of developmentally-informed practices used with young adults involved in the criminal justice system. This information will help OJP and NIJ establish program and research priorities for this critical population. The consultant will gather details on existing programs and strategies from a variety of stakeholders, including our partners in law enforcement, prosecution, courts, probation, parole, corrections, and related professional organizations.

If your organization is implementing any programs or strategies that address the needs of justice-involved young adults, or if you are aware of successful efforts in place in your community or elsewhere, please send them to YoungAdultCrimJustPrograms@usdoj.gov. Oversight of this project is provided by NIJ Social Science Analyst Carrie Mulford, who can be reached at Carrie.Mulford@usdoj.gov or (202) 307-2959. Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karol V. Mason".

Karol V. Mason
Assistant Attorney General