



CRIMINAL JUSTICE FAX



RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH DIVISION

Volume 10 Issue 8

Preventing Crime and Youth Violence: What Works?

Ten years ago last month, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) published a widely disseminated Research Brief entitled "Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising"¹ that outlined what works to prevent crime, especially youth violence. Based on a review of more than 500 prevention program evaluations, the authors summarized a number of effective strategies in eleven areas (from infancy through adulthood), but generally concluded "that there is minimally adequate evidence to establish a provisional list of what works". While the methods for evaluating programs have not gotten easier since this review was completed, and implementing a vigorous process and impact evaluation continues to be a challenge in a number of ways (i.e., real world constraints, cost), the growing body of literature in the field of violence prevention would seem to suggest that we should know more now in terms of what works than we did a decade ago.

As part of a recently completed review of the literature for the San Diego County Probation Department that focused on identifying effective youth interventions, the Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG described research that found what program components are *most* effective when working with youth (e.g., larger amounts of meaningful contact between participants and staff, especially in the community; cognitive-behavioral methods with reinforcements; focus on employment skills rather than vocational skills; service delivery based on individual need), as well as *less* effective (e.g., shorter duration of treatment; unstructured or undocumented interventions; targeting low-risk offenders). Specific programs that received the highest ratings (based on positive outcomes documented through a rigorous evaluation) included:

- academic opportunities, including the "Boys and Girls Club of America After-School Program" and the "Lindamood-Bell Literacy Program";
- interventions targeting criminality, including the "Capital and Serious Violent Offender Treatment Program" and "Thinking for a Change";
- family-focused interventions, including "Brief Strategic Family Therapy", "Functional Family Therapy", and "Multi-Systemic Therapy";
- mental health therapy, including "Dialectical Behavior Therapy", "Family Integrated Transitions Project", "Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care"; and
- substance abuse treatment, including "Motivational Enhancement Therapy", the "Phoenix Academy", and "Project Towards No Drug Abuse".

For additional information about these and other effective youth violence prevention and intervention programs, as well as technical assistance opportunities that may be available, please visit these national Web sites that offer additional information:

- www.helpingamericasyouth.gov
- www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints
- www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/youthviolence
- www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/programs/mpg.html.

¹ Sherman, L. W., Gottfredson, D. C., MacKenzie, D. L., Eck, J., Reuter, P., & Bushway, S. D. (1998). Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/171676.htm.