

Preventing juvenile crime through effective intervention programs essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



Preventing Juvenile Crime Through Effective Intervention Programs

When the public reads or hears reports about juvenile violence and delinquency, our initial reaction is, or may be that something must be done about “ those kids.” Legislation is passed by politicians that promise stricter penalties and much harsh sentencing for juvenile offenders in response to the public’s concern. Locking these juveniles away for longer periods of time and using our tax money to build more detention and correctional facilities, is indeed making the public feel like it is working to create a safer society in which to live, work and raise families, however, it only provides what it appears to be a quick fix to a serious problem. A better approach to reducing juvenile delinquency and crime is to provide services through community-based, family-focused, and prevention-oriented collaboration.

While change is not easy, solutions, such as building more prisons or adding more beds in existing facilities to accommodate those affected by “ get tough on juveniles” policies, are not only less effective, but also cost more than proactive approaches such as preventing crime and providing educational supports to offenders and their families (Greenwood, Model, Rydell, & Shiesa, 1996). These proactive approaches are shown to be effective when agencies make the commitment to collaborate with one another in order to help the youth and their families. These prevention efforts may help to keep youth from ever coming in contact with the juvenile justice system and help them eventually graduate high school while other youth may need more targeted interventions which help them transition out

of a corrections system and back into their school and community without relapsing to previous actions.

As agencies collaborate to form a reliable foundation for the change in juvenile violence and delinquency, the establishment of clear goals for the targeted population is important to provide the needed services.

Collaboration has been defined as, “ the process of individuals or organizations sharing resources and responsibilities jointly to plan, implement, and evaluate programs to achieve common goals” (Jackson & Maddy, 1992, p. 1). Some collaboration requires developing new systems that coordinate services and provide accountability built around the needs of students, families and communities. It also requires that professionals reach across the traditional boundaries that separate them from each other in order to support families and serve youth. Traditionally in education, juvenile justice, public welfare, and mental health, professional practice has involved developing expertise in accordance with standards, outcomes, and statements of best practices for each profession. (Greenwood, Model, Rydell, & Shiesa, 1996).

The expected outcome of this collaboration between caring adult professionals and organizations is that once the factors that contribute to the problem are identified and removed, and the juvenile has the skills, supports, and recognition necessary to get his or her needs met in a socially acceptable way and their “ symptoms” of delinquency will diminish. While this has been shown to be a proactive approach, it has also gotten to the root of the problem and worked to effectively prevent the problem from

escalating, reduce its frequency, or decrease its chances of ever occurring in the first place. Many prevention advocates insist that the only way to stop juvenile crime is to attack it before it starts through early intervention in the lives of at risk children. Because most programs seem to be short term, there is just not enough medicine to cure the problem. Advocates say that education must play a key role in preventing and shaping juveniles lives by offering in school programs that teach conflict resolution, social skills and how to resist gangs and drugs that might be present in the communities in which they reside. The need for these programs to be long term and consistent is vital, collaborating in school efforts with those of the community could also bring about change. Community-wide collaborative efforts can change community norms. In Abilene, Texas, the cities gang population reduced from 650 to 75 between 1988 and 1993, essentially by tackling youth crime as a communitywide responsibility (CQ Researcher, 1996). This city also built boys and girls clubs next to elementary schools in high crime areas, let the schools use them as gyms during the day and community used them after school and at night for recreation and basketball.

Reported crimes in those areas soon dropped 46 percent (CQ Researcher, 1996). The more risk factors to which a child or youth is exposed; the more likely he or she is to become delinquent. Youth need to know that they are valued as contributing members of their communities and that there are programs for them. Local programs should provide clear standards for youth as well as attempt to strengthen social bonds and provide positive role models. Communities should not only collaborate with the at risk children

but their families as well. Engaging the family as partners and being able to build on their strengths, demonstrates not only empathy and respect but also provides the family with support. Family characteristics play a vital role in the way children behave. Research indicates that children, who are exposed to violence at home, school, or in their community, have a tendency toward delinquent behavior (Elliott, 1994; Huizinga, 1997; Loeber, & Hay, 1994). The correlation of child abuse, parental neglect and lack of supervision or effective monitoring also has a strong negative impact. Part of the community change interventions includes family support resource centers which seek to establish and strengthen social support systems for families. These interventions can serve as a foundation for those parents who lack basic educational skills and experience with positive disciplinary practices however, they may be ill-equipped to protect children in families with problems such as inadequate housing and long-term health or mental health disorders. Intervention programs offer a support system of parental involvement and education that works to improve family functioning and with that, child functioning (Zigler and Taussig 1003).

This aspect of dealing with the family also makes these programs more comprehensive, which is another factor of good programs. This prevention oriented collaboration between not only at risk children and paraprofessionals but also their families and communities do serve as effective programs to reduce delinquency in youth. The benefit of these collaborative programs is that, rather than temporarily removing these offenders from society, we work together to create a safe society in which to

live, work and raise a family. Instead of focusing only on punishing “ those kids”, these efforts work together to collaboratively identify and address the individual, family, and societal issues that make “ those kids” act in unlawful ways. These collaborative efforts will also not only change the likelihood that the interventions will be long-term, but also have the ability to change the norms of the communities. While this is not easy, the result will be worthwhile and will benefit the youth, their communities and their families, all together.

References

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