

**In Search of Evidence-Based Practice in Juvenile Corrections:
An Evaluation of Florida’s Avon Park Youth Academy and Street Smart Program**

Abstract

Administered by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Avon Park Youth Academy (APYA)/ STREET Smart (SS) program has received national and international recognition as a “Promising Program” in juvenile corrections. With the sponsorship of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the U.S. Department of Labor, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) was commissioned to conduct a rigorous evaluation to determine if the APYA/SS program has achieved the status of an “Evidence-Based Practice.”

APYA is a secure custody residential facility that provides specialized, remedial education and intensive vocational training to moderate-risk male youth committed to DJJ. SS was the reentry component of the program that provided community support, and educational and vocational services to APYA participants on a voluntary basis after their release to the community.

To conduct the evaluation, NCCD designed and conducted a field trial that randomly assigned eligible youth to the APYA/SS program or to a control that participated in other DJJ programs across the state. This experimental design permitted a rigorous test of the hypothesis, that, compared to the control group, APYA/SS participants would demonstrate more positive educational achievement, increased labor force participation, and reduced recidivism outcomes during a three year follow-up period after community release.

Findings from the evaluation showed that APYA/SS youth had more positive educational outcomes with significantly higher rates of diploma awards both during secure care and over a two-year period following release than did control group participants.

In addition, employment outcome measures based on a three-year cumulative post-release follow-up period showed that APYA/SS youth were employed at significantly higher percentages and had higher employment participation and earnings than the control group.

Finally, recidivism outcomes showed that APYA/SS youth had significantly lower rates of felony and property arrests during the first year following community release. However, lower rates of recidivism were not sustained for the experimental group during the subsequent second and third years of the follow-up period with the exception of African American and Hispanic subgroups indicating a differential program benefit for these minorities.

The evaluation of the APYA/SS program demonstrates that it has the potential to join the modest but growing list of evidence-based practices in juvenile corrections. However, NCCD evaluators recommended that program modifications and further research may be needed for APYA/SS to fully achieve the status of an evidence-based practice.

The full report can be found at: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/228804.pdf>.