

CHOICES

for families

Services evolve to help reclaim youth

Dear Reader:

The extraordinary stresses of the new economy demand that all programs be evaluated for impact and cost effectiveness – two values which have driven the JAC/CMO system since it was created in 1999.

In this issue of *Choices* we explore the continually evolving services that help families reclaim their youngsters, as well as the personal experiences of the professional men and women who provide the services.

Correct Course and Parent Management Training are the most recent JAC initiatives being carried out with the county, court and community networks. They are excellent examples of our evidence-based approach to services.

Staff testimonials provide insight into how public support for the programs actually translates into concrete improvements for families and in the communities.

Because *utilization review* and *quality assurance* are important new modalities that must govern all social services, and because they drive our internal operations at the Juvenile Assessment Center, we are also pleased to include our latest *Occasional Paper* explaining how the methodology can be used to correct program weaknesses and build on program successes.

Cynthia J. Smith

Cynthia J. Smith, President/CEO
Juvenile Assessment Center



New program teaches more effective parenting

Overview: The theory

Parent Management Training Oregon Evidence Based Services [PMTO] is a strength-based program designed to work with parents to better assist them to provide the direction, structure and safety necessary for family life. It helps parents and caregivers manage the behavior of the children for whom they are responsible. It is designed to promote children's social skills and cooperation. It emphasizes both the caregivers and the child's assets and fosters what is best in the individual and family.

Since strengths often evolve out of adversity, the approach starts by guiding clients in a researched methodology to use and strengthen the resources at hand. The facilitator

helps caregivers identify and use learned skills, showing them how to set goals worth pursuing and build on their nurturing strengths.

PMTO interventions are guided by the following key concepts:

- Helping clients use the resources and tools within and around them to reach goals and overcome obstacles.
- Understanding people's ability to transform adversity and thrive.
- Recognizing that everyone needs and wants to belong to a supportive group or community.

Key staff from the **Juvenile Assessment Center, Ennis Center for Children, Oakland County Catholic Social Services** and **Matrix Human Services** are being trained at the JAC's newly-designed media

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A newsletter about juvenile services for Wayne County

Parents get help managing childrens' behavior *(continued from page 1)*

training center. Through weekly on-line video conferencing, **Marion Forgatch, PhD** monitors work with specific families, coaches and critiques staff work and suggest ways to improve techniques.

The adaptation of the model to parents who are at risk of losing rights to their children because of abuse or neglect is unique to Wayne County. Moreover, it is beginning to demonstrate potential for successful child and family well-being. Court jurists and the Michigan Department of Human Services want to know that caregivers have the necessary skills to care for their children. They frequently require parent education before considering family reunification.

Using an evidence-based model provides continuity of service and assures that parents learn practical skills that allow for:

1. Encouragement of positive behavior
2. Systematic, mild consequences for negative behavior
3. Monitoring
4. Problem-solving
5. Positive involvement

Groups of eight to ten caregivers participate in two weeks of assessment and an initial 12-week parent education course entitled "Working through Change" to learn how to handle



emotions, resolve conflicts and manage daily life so that they can engage with their children positively. The following 12 topics are building blocks which, when taken together, offer them new tools to put their families back together:

1. Working through Change
2. Encouraging Cooperation
3. Teaching New Behavior
4. Observing Emotions
5. Managing Emotions
6. Setting Limits
7. Following Through
8. Communicating with Children
9. Solving Problems
10. Managing Conflicts
11. Monitoring Children's Activities
12. Balancing Work and Play

Throughout the 12 weeks, group facilitators explore the various strengths of participants, such as:

- The ability to put troubles in perspective, find purpose in life and persevere with some insight and optimism
- A sense of integrity, courage and insight about their life situation
- Communication skills and willingness to show empathy, compassion, cooperation, tolerance and forgiveness
- The ability to get and make good use of social and community supports
- Survival skills that enable them to maintain good health.

Facilitators look for ways to help parents resolve and prevent issues that divide their families. They focus on the positive, encouraging participants to realize that goals are achievable. Supporting components include:

- Observing and recording behavior
- Regulating emotions
- Fostering communication through cooperation.

PMTO has been adopted by the JAC

because of its genuine, proven focus on identifying a person's cultural and social circumstances and because it shows clients how to use them to strengthen themselves and their families. PMTO is an effective tool for enabling people to develop into the kind of individuals and parents they want to be.

Results: Client feedback and program evaluation

PMTO's curriculum requires ongoing measurement. Because it is an evidence-based approach, participants give their feedback upon completion.

The results were overwhelmingly positive with most respondents indicating they are using the parenting techniques taught in the program and are seeing positive changes in their children's behaviors. All said

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they would recommend the program to other parents. Mentioned among the most helpful components of the class were the discipline techniques, strategies for managing emotions and encouraging cooperation by children. Participants reported they particularly liked the notebooks and practice assignments. Responses included:

- I wouldn't change a thing!
- Facilitators were understanding, nice, and good teachers. They were also good listeners and provided me with good information and advice when need.
- This class was very useful for me. I learned a lot of good things.

PMTO is teaching our staff and families to experience a new way of looking at the relationships between caretakers and children. It is making a difference and influencing the way professionals support and encourage the development of parenting skills.

PMTO Practice: The clients and the facilitators speak



Editor's note: All neglect/abuse cases in the juvenile justice system, involving children who had been removed from the home, come through protective service and court referral. Total strangers come together and open up because they want help and knowledge.

Two of JAC's trained PMTO Facilitators, Iye Inaede and Kamau Inaede, shared their insights about using the methodology with referred clients.

"Parents... are very willing to do what is necessary to get their children back."

"Their dreams become goals," they explain. "We show them how to look beyond their current situation and teach them to make their goals real.

"While most parents acknowledge they had made poor choices, they are willing to do what is necessary to get their children back. Poor choices were often a result of very limited knowledge of how to be effective parents.

"The PMTO 12 steps are powerful teaching tools designed to give them the knowledge they need and want. 'Role plays,' for example, are used as a key technique to 'de-brief' the group, discover how they approach child-rearing situations, and show them how to reinforce and apply what they are learning to be better at their job. Role-playing also helps determine if parents actually understand what is being taught.

"Eight parents who completed the 12-week course gave the following feedback:

- 'It changed my life,' said one husband and father, who after initial resistance, quickly engaged in the process.
- The most important outcome was putting lessons learned into practice at home:
 - ▼ Learning to 'respond' rather than 'react' by using positive reinforcement with our children!
 - ▼ Staying calm under stress instead of arguing and fighting helped us.

- By talking together to work a problem out a single father got custody of his children after arranging a meeting with the mother to resolve issues together.
- A mother whose young infant was taken from her was desperate. We could see she loved her children and built on that to help her gain the self-confidence, will power and mental/spiritual strength to transform a sense of hopelessness into a hopeful realization to be a more effective mother.

"Leading a group with such intense, life transforming issues involving the care and custody of children made us better parents ourselves! The lessons we had to teach them helped get under our skin a little more because it had to make sense to us before we could make it have sense to them.

"Our job was not only to impart specific knowledge and information but also to make sure they have the capacity and readiness to receive it – first by paying attention 'to people's attitudes and moods' to determine 'readiness.'

"Our work is both exhilarating and humbling, especially when members of the group discover their strengths and can't wait to put them into practice and have their children back home with them."

Diversion programs overcome obstacles

By Mary Johnson, JAC Diversion Coordinator

I work with hundreds of youth and their families as a partner with the Wayne County Prosecutors Office in the Correct Course program. First-time offenders are referred from the regular court docket to the JAC, which conducts an initial assessment and referral to local youth assistance programs.

I administer the **Juvenile Inventory for Functioning (JIFF)**, an amazing tool which addresses ten domains in the youth's life: health related need, substance abuse, self-harm potential, feelings, community misbehavior, peer influence, family environment, non-compliance in home, picked on by peers and school.

The staff and the family work together to design a service plan customized for the youth and family based solely on their answers to the JIFF. No two service plans are ever the same because each family's answers are always unique.

Numerous times I have witnessed families that have come to our department angry, frightened, anxious and cautious. After they take the JIFF and start talking to staff there is a drastic change in their demeanor; a dialogue begins with youth and

caregiver. Once a plan is in place, families are referred to a local Youth Assistance program for the specific services.

It has been amazing to see a family recognize the awesome opportunity for their youth to get back on the "Correct Course" and have no record.

The program gives youth a second chance, addresses overrepresentation of minorities in the system and brings new hope to youth and families. One parent, for example, came back to my office with a wrinkled up piece of paper in her bag—the original service plan. She told me she uses the plan to continue to understand and seek services for her youth. Her feedback reflects how earnest most parents are to learn how to handle and resolve issues with their children.

The JIFF is an effective assessment tool for the youth and the parent. The professionals working with the youth and families enhance its effectiveness. They have to be patient, caring, knowledgeable and empathic.

Recently a 15-year-old from Southwest Detroit indicated that he

wanted help, structure and someone to support him while he got it "back together." He freely admitted that he had given up associating with his negative peers. Recognizing he was a youth who was having difficulties in school mostly due to cultural differences, staff communicated with the school and brought the matter to a successful outcome.

Many, many positive outcomes validate that the intervention works and works well. The recidivism rate is very low. If a youth recidivates, it is almost always for a less serious offense.

The strongest assurance that the program will continue to work well is the unity among all the entities involved: Wayne County 3rd Circuit Court-Family Division, Wayne County Children and Family Services, Wayne County prosecutors, Juvenile Assessment Center and the Youth Assistance Programs throughout Wayne County. Because collaboration, teamwork and mutual cooperation support the youth and families of Wayne County, I am proud to be part of the innovative, creative and positive work.

"The program gives youth a second chance."



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