Risk, Need, and Strength Assessments

“The problem perspective tends to isolate and control problem youth. The juvenile justice system is perhaps the most extreme example of this mindset. Young people are assets to be valued rather than problems to be controlled.”

- William Barton & Jeffrey Butts
At the end of this module, the participant will be able to:

1. Understand the importance of good assessments
2. Differentiate between risk factors and youth needs
3. Adopt a strength-based approach to youth in the juvenile justice system
Young people in the juvenile justice system typically experience numerous risk factors. Which risk factors do you think are most strongly correlated with recidivism? Put another way, which risk factors are the best predictors of continued offending?
The Importance of Good Assessments - Risks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substant</th>
<th>Single Parent</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Childhood</th>
<th>Attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>Household</td>
<td>Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>Disorder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-social peers</td>
<td>Mood Disorders</td>
<td>Low Self Esteem</td>
<td>Anti-Social Attitudes</td>
<td>Incarcerated Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Personality</td>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>Alcohol Use</td>
<td>Defiance</td>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Low Self Control</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Incarcerated Sibling</td>
<td>Parents with Substance Abuse Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessing Violence</td>
<td>Low Performing Schools</td>
<td>Chronic Lying</td>
<td>Absent Father</td>
<td>Low Religiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Community Support</td>
<td>Anxious Disorder</td>
<td>Poor Communication Skills</td>
<td>Disrespect for Authority</td>
<td>Dysfunctional Family Ties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Importance of Good Assessments

- My Predictions

- What the Research Says
Biggest Risk Factors

What risk factors are the strongest predictors of youth re-offending?

- Anti-social Attitudes
- Anti-social Peers
- Low Self-Control
- Dysfunctional Family Ties

Sheperdson & Bello (2001)
If the juvenile court called you up and said “we’ve got a young person who’s locked up whom we’d like to send to you. Will you take him?” What would be your response?
What is RISK?

In juvenile justice interventions, RISK refers very specifically to the likelihood of **re-arrest** or to the threat the young person poses to **public safety**.

It is important to remember that youth may be “high risk” for any number of other social issues, but not necessarily high risk to re-offend or a threat to public safety. Some of these issues might include:

- Risk of contracting an STD
- Risk of Dropping Out of School
- Risk of Developing a Substance Abuse Problem

In the juvenile justice system, it is very important to separate the risk of **re-offending** from other risky behaviors, or we run the risk of punishing youth for their social service **needs**.
Why is assessing risk important?

We need to assess risk so that we know:

1. What level of service / supervision a young person needs or does not need.
2. What specific behavior the young person is doing that presents a threat to the safety of the community.
3. We are adequately prepared to address the specifics of that young person’s situation.
THE RISK PRINCIPLE: the intensity of the intervention should match the young person’s risk of re-offending.

- Youth who are **HIGHER** risk to re-offend require **more** supervision and services

- Youth who are **LOWER** risk to re-offend require **less** supervision and services
Many juvenile justice systems use risk matrixes to guide decision-making about whether youth need to be confined and what level of services/supervision they require.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Level</th>
<th>Supervision Required</th>
<th>Programming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No Supervision</td>
<td>Brief or non-mandated community programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Some Supervision</td>
<td>Short-term community programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Intensive Supervision Confinement</td>
<td>Longer-term programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What population of youth in your jurisdiction who are not necessarily high risk to re-offend are being confined unnecessarily?

What service / supervision might you provide to give the juvenile justice system an option other than confinement?
Common violations of the RISK principle

- Providing too little supervision and services for high risk youth
- Providing too much supervision and services for low risk youth
Ways to assess RISK

- Standardized Risk Assessment Instruments
- Criminal History
- Community Knowledge
- Practitioner Intuition
Tatiana’s Story

- Review Tatiana’s Intake Assessment

On p. iii of the Appendix in the back of your workbook
Tatiana’s Story

- How is Tatiana most likely to RE-OFFEND?

- What level of RISK would you classify Tatiana?

- What level of SUPERVISION does Tatiana require?

- How long should that SUPERVISION last?
In juvenile justice interventions, the term *NEEDS* is often used to talk about underlying conditions which may affect ongoing criminal or antisocial behavior. There are two types of needs:

1. **SOCIAL**: needs relating to basic social welfare, such as:
   - Education
   - Mental Health
   - Substance Abuse
   - Housing
   - Family
What are NEEDS?

2. CRIMINOGENIC: needs that tend to produce crime or criminality

- Antisocial Attitudes
- Antisocial Peers
- Low Impulse Control
- Poor Decision-Making Skills
- Aggression/Violence
4.3 B.

The NEED Principle

**The NEED Principle:** the services provided should target the needs most likely to lead to re-offending

- Youth have numerous needs but not all of these are *criminogenic*
- Services should target *criminogenic* needs
- Programs can address non-criminogenic needs, but services for these needs should not be mandated or under threat of sanction
It is important for community-based programs to develop individualized strategy plans for youth that address their individual needs. These plans should MANDATE services for criminogenic needs, but have OPTIONAL programming/services for social service (non-criminogenic) needs.
Tatiana’s Story

- What are Tatiana’s CRIMINOGENIC needs (the needs that drive the offending behavior).

- What are Tatiana’s SOCIAL SERVICE needs (non-criminogenic)?
Confusing criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs

Committing to serve youth whose needs are greater than program capacity

Sanctioning youth for failure to comply with mandates for NEEDS that have little to do with RISK.
The justice system is primarily concerned with RISK. Juvenile justice interventions are often focused on NEEDS. Given the multiple risks and needs swirling around youth in the juvenile justice system, we often forget to look at STRENGTHS.
### 4.4 A. The Strength Perspective

#### Changing the Frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSUMPTIONS</th>
<th>Youth as Victim</th>
<th>Youth as Villain</th>
<th>Youth as Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origins of Most Delinquent Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Symptom of underlying disturbance</td>
<td>Anti-social impulses, lack of restraint due to permissiveness and the absence of punishment</td>
<td>Normative response to adolescent needs for status, belonging, power &amp; excitement, lack of empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Delinquent Youth Compare with Other Adolescents</strong></td>
<td>Fundamentally different in psychological and emotional makeup</td>
<td>Fundamentally different motivations and impulses toward deviant behavior</td>
<td>Largely similar to other adolescents but with fewer social assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delinquent Youth Capacity for Behavior Change</strong></td>
<td>Incapable of conventional behavior without therapeutic interventions</td>
<td>Incapable of conventional behavior without strict discipline and the threat of punishment</td>
<td>Inherently capable of conventional behavior with sufficient access to supports and pro-social opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Intervention Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Individual or family-based therapeutic treatment</td>
<td>Deterrence and retributive punishment</td>
<td>Skill development, attachment and engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Treatment</strong></td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risks of Treatment</strong></td>
<td>Could fail to address underlying cause(s)</td>
<td>Could delay or impede deterrence</td>
<td>Could introduce stigma or harm—i.e., iatrogenic effects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 A.

Key Principles of the Strengths Perspective

- Every individual, group, family and community has **STRENGTHS**
- Practitioners best serve clients by **collaborating with them**
- Every environment is full of **resources**

(Saleeby, 2006)
The juvenile justice system is notorious for categorizing youth solely according to their deficits. Without ignoring the very real needs that youth have, and some of the risk factors that threaten community safety, community-based programs can make a conscious effort to practice STRENGTH-based or ASSET-based thinking in working with system-involved youth.
What are Tatiana’s INDIVIDUAL Strengths?

What are Tatiana’s FAMILY Strengths?

What are Tatiana’s COMMUNITY Strengths?
Tell me one **ACTIVITY** that you like doing so much that when you are doing that thing, you barely think about getting into trouble.

Tell me about a **PERSON** who encourages you, makes you feel good about yourself, helps you to be your best self, and brings out the best in you.
Recognizing that programs often have limited capacity and a short window of time to make an impact on a young person’s life, we caution against trying to tackle everything all at once. CCFY recommends a simplified approach to working with youth in the justice system, one that is focused and directive and can have a major impact on life outcomes.
RISK: What is Tatiana most likely to RE-OFFEND for? What intensity of supervision does she require? How long should she be mandated to a program?

NEEDS: Which CRIMINOGENIC NEED is driving the offending behavior and must be addressed to help Tatiana avoid re-offending? What services should she be mandated to complete to address this need?

What SOCIAL SERVICE NEEDS does Tatiana have that left unaddressed might also contribute to her getting in trouble? What non-mandated services does she need to meet those needs?

What STRENGTHS could Tatiana build on to help her develop and stay out of trouble? What programming could Tatiana participate in that would build on her strengths? What positive people can help Tatiana get through this experience?
END OF DAY ONE

- Closing Exercise: *Share One Takeaway from Today*

- *Networking & Leveraging Relationships*