

Impact Profile: Missouri Division of Youth Services

A Leveraged Investment in Lasting Change



In Missouri, FFI partnered with the Division of Youth Services (DYS) to orient services around wellbeing for justice-involved youth in care and transitioning back to their communities.

Colin was placed in a specialized treatment program several hours from home because the tailored programming was an excellent fit for his needs and his parents were able to travel to see him. But when Colin’s father’s health declined and dialysis was required, travelling for visits became impossible. Colin, worried and feeling cut off, began to act out, leading to restraints and other consequences. The tradeoffs of a distant-from-home-placement weren’t worth it for DYS or for Colin anymore.

DYS staff recognized this, and arranged for an administrative transfer to a residential program much closer to home. Most of his family could now visit more, but his dad still couldn’t because of his condition, so DYS staff took Colin to the house for visits. They also held the transition home meeting at the house, which meant that the transition plan was better: DYS staff got to see the house, talk about a support system, have conversations with Colin and his parents about setting and maintaining healthy boundaries (a core component of Colin’s plan), and develop alternative plans together. They even used furlough time for Colin to go home and help his family set up the room he was going to move into after his release.

Colin has moved on from DYS involvement, re-enrolled in community school, and all signs point to a lasting new direction for him and his family.



Wellbeing banners created by Northeast region youth, staff and teachers.

A Wellbeing Orientation Improves Outcomes

- Since 2011 when DYS began the implementation of its enhanced comprehensive treatment based on the Five Domains of Wellbeing, outcomes have improved:

Measure	FY 2010	Improvements
One year law abiding rates	83.95%	89.06% FY 16 (last completed year)
Two year law abiding rates	73.66%	80.32% FY 15 (last completed year)
Three year law abiding rates	65.74%	72.82% FY 14 (last completed year)
Academic progress	86.67%	89.20% FY 17
Educational completion	38.14%	41.70% FY 17

- What is most encouraging about the data is that during this period the state has experienced a decrease in youth coming into DYS, thanks to efforts to divert youth from residential treatment. What this means is that the youth in DYS now are youth who have committed, on average, more serious offenses, and they often face more significant challenges at home and in community, including poverty and trauma. That DYS has managed not only to “hold the line” on its outcomes, but also to improve them, speaks to the power of an orientation around wellbeing.

FFI’s Approach to Systems Change Is Efficient

- Missouri DYS’s annual budget is approximately \$55,000,000.
- Over six years, FFI’s highly targeted, leveraged approach has cost approximately \$475,000, paid through a combination of local and national philanthropy and some direct contracting with the state. This has benefited not only DYS, but created tools, trainings and materials that are now in use in other systems and jurisdictions, and which have provided examples for other systems of what is possible.
- A wellbeing orientation isn’t about doing more, and it’s not about adding programs. It is about doing differently with what is already available.

A Wellbeing Orientation Changes Perspectives

- Youth in DYS who give tours of their facilities have added in discussions of the importance of wellbeing, and what wellbeing is, for visitors.
- During Family Days, staff set up stations for kids to educate their parents about different domains of wellbeing.
- Staff and kids design and hang wellbeing banners in their dorms, at graduation, in classrooms and more to reinforce the importance of wellbeing and of addressing tradeoffs—for everyone.
- Staff credit conversations about access to wellbeing with creating the space for them to grapple with their own questions and concerns about sexual orientation, trauma and other issues vital in youth development.

FFI’s Approach Is Durable

- DYS’s wellbeing orientation work has carried over through a change of agency leadership and through a cross-party gubernatorial transition.

“ You are on the cutting edge of pushing for quality outcomes...You are operationalizing a response that factors in youth perspective and that leverages the potential for positive change and traction in important life domains. Well done and very much appreciated.

— Peter Forbes, Commissioner,
Massachusetts Department of Youth Services