

PROMOTING SERVICES THAT KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER: PROVEN STRATEGIES THAT TRANSFORM SERVICE SYSTEMS TO BETTER SUPPORT AT-RISK AND SYSTEM-INVOLVED CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Despite the widespread availability of services and programs for at-risk children, youth, and families that are scientifically-proven, family-focused and community-based, thousands of children in the United States are removed from their homes by the child welfare system, and thousands more are sent to ineffective, expensive, and harmful placements by the juvenile justice system, including detention centers, correctional centers, and residential treatment facilities (RTFs). Such policies are intended to provide for the safety of the child, the family, and the community but unintentionally disrupt healthy child development and may induce fear and anxiety in these children—resulting from the trauma of separation from their family.

Evidence-Based Associates (EBA) is dedicated to reducing the unnecessary removal and out-of-home placement of youth and to improving the quality and effectiveness of child- and youth-serving systems through the high-quality implementation of intensive, home-based, evidence-based, and family-focused programs. EBA works with leaders of child-serving agencies (e.g., juvenile justice, child welfare, etc.), policy-makers, and other caring professionals who serve high-risk youth, by introducing effective ways to reduce costs and improve outcomes for youth and their families. Most often, EBA’s clients are innovative champions who aspire to achieve effective system transformation within their state.

To achieve the best possible results, EBA’s programs and support services are centered on a small set of internationally recognized, research-proven programs known as evidence-based programs (EBPs). EBA utilizes only those programs which meet the highest standards of scientific scrutiny, each demonstrating the following characteristics:

- Tested through randomized, controlled trials
- Consistent, proven, positive outcomes
- Cost-effective investment for public resources
- Nationally recognized and endorsed by the health and science community

While the programs are effective and intensive, the challenge—as some systems have found—is to implement them with high-fidelity. If high-fidelity implementation is not achieved, EBPs can lead to less-than-optimal results and widespread frustration. **This is where EBA adds value.**

From administrative oversight to referral management to data collection and evaluation, EBA provides all the start-up support mechanisms required to successfully implement these EBPs, including:

- Assessing community needs and identifying the appropriate evidence-based program to meet the need;
- Recruitment of qualified local, community-based service providers who are ‘ready willing and able’ to deliver the services identified;
- Training and supporting agencies in best practices for recruiting, hiring, training and retaining talented staff;
- Brokering training and licensing agreements with EBP developers and purveyors;
- Coordinating EBP orientation training, follow-up training, and program start-up;
- Ensuring compliance with all required licenses and certifications (state- and EBP model-specific);
- Development of referral and data collection protocols;
- Monitoring to ensure strict fidelity to the model programs standards and practices;
- Holding providers and stakeholders at ALL levels accountable for outcomes; and
- Establishing performance measurement processes and milestones reporting schedules.

EBA helps leaders in child-serving systems (e.g., child welfare, juvenile justice) to navigate the complex challenges of implementing EBPs and to obtain successful outcomes. By working with EBA, systems have access to a broad range of tools, resources, and expertise that support high-fidelity implementation of proven treatment models for high-risk youth.

By offering gold-standard programs to their clients and by overseeing the implementation of the programs through strict, quality-assurance measures, EBA is able to provide four key benefits to its clients (represented by the four 'points' in the EBA star logo).

- 1) *Become **more efficient** in how they serve high-risk youth – we serve **MORE** youth **MORE** quickly.*
- 2) *Provide program and service options that **lower contracting risks** and provide **measurable outcomes**.*
- 3) *Improve contractor – and therefore government – **accountability**.*
- 4) *Ensure better use of taxpayer dollars by providing **cost-effective** alternatives to out-of-home placement.*

THE NEED

Child Welfare: Across the country, leaders in Child Welfare systems are challenged to improve their child welfare systems—to ensure the safety and well-being of children in their county or state—while working within existing budget parameters. At the same time, recent reviews conducted by the federal government (i.e. the Federal Child and Family Service Review, a periodic assessment of state systems) revealed that approximately one in five state child welfare agencies met ‘substantial conformity’ with the service array standard.

Most states, thus, appear to lack an array of services that can both a) assess the strengths and needs of children and families referred to the system; and b) determine what services best address the needs of those families—whereby creating a safe home environment, enabling children to remain safely with their parents, and helping children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency. Numerous child welfare agencies cited prolonged waiting lists as a major problem. But of equal concern was the lack of *any evidence that the services at the end of these waiting lists are effective*.

Juvenile Justice: Each year, more than a million juvenile cases are handled in juvenile courts across the country and roughly 60,000 youth are removed from their homes, schools, and communities. These youth are typically those who have been arrested, adjudicated, and committed to juvenile detention or correctional center. Sadly, these cases often represent ‘systemic failure’ where the needs for prevention and early intervention services were not recognized or addressed adequately in their community.

The juvenile justice system is highly fragmented and despite the widespread acceptance of evidence-based approaches, the market still relies heavily on traditional, sometimes punitive approaches to control youth in its care and custody. Youth are frequently placed in detention centers or residential facilities followed by a period of aftercare or parole supervision once they return to their community.

Historically, outcomes associated with these traditional placement approaches (e.g., juvenile correctional centers) are poor, with high rates of recidivism. According to a 2016 national report from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, recidivism rates across traditional programs are typically higher than 50 percent – some as high as 80%. Meanwhile, costs of out-of-home placements for such youth easily exceed \$3.5 billion, annually with the per youth cost ranging from \$35,000 to more than \$250,000 annually for each placement, depending on the locale and the availability of ancillary services (e.g. medication management).

“As current and former leaders of youth justice agencies around the country, we believe that the time has come to close down youth prisons, once and for all. Our collective experience “on the inside” has shown us that separating youth from their families and communities and emphasizing punishment and retribution harms young people and their communities.”

– Joint Statement from Youth Corrections Leaders for Justice (see <https://yclj.org/statement>)

With poor results and extremely high costs, the need for change is clear. Recently, the Annie E. Casey foundation helped assemble a coalition of leaders calling for the end of youth prisons (**#noyouthprisons**). Time is ripe for change!

THE SOLUTION

Introduce low-cost, highly-effective community-based programs

EBA introduces and helps to implement innovative, evidence-based treatment programs to child-serving systems so their agencies can serve at-risk children and youth at lower cost with better outcomes. Cost reductions associated with utilizing the programs available through EBA can be more than 50 percent compared to current system-wide spending, and success rates are often 75% percent or more, thereby keeping families intact whenever possible, reducing the need for out-of-home placement, and improving public safety at lower costs.

With EBA's technical support, clients have a much easier time initiating and implementing these community-based projects – becoming more efficient in how they serve high-risk youth and with better results. While EBPs can sometimes take 1-2 years to go from idea to full-scale implementation, EBA programs typically launch and achieve full caseloads within 4-6 months.

Monitor fidelity, focus on measurable outcomes

Because EBA's services require a commitment to change and breaking through the bureaucracy, their clients are typically innovative leaders who struggle with implementing effective reform within the existing systems. EBA is the only organization in the country focused on exclusively helping leaders within juvenile justice and child-serving systems bridge the gap between the 'potential' of evidence-based programs and realizing their true value.

From assessment to implementation, EBA improves system accountability by providing sustainable, long-term solutions and guaranteeing outcomes and cost-savings. This is accomplished by ensuring high-quality implementation and fidelity to the programs they selectively utilize—allowing their clients to demonstrate leadership and positive outcomes for their communities.

Build a continuum of programs matched to identified risks and needs

With the proper oversight, technical support and management, EBPs provide a more cost-effective option for high-risk youth. This was first demonstrated by EBA's successful Redirection project in Florida, a project created to "redirect" troubled youth from residential placements to more effective, family-focused, evidence-based treatment options. [A 2010 report from Florida's Office of Public Program Analysis and Government Accountability](#) informed the Florida Legislature that the Redirection project saved taxpayers more than \$50 million over a five-year period.

Most juvenile justice systems face increasing costs, poor outcomes and challenging relationships with service providers who, in turn, struggle with under-funded, under-performing programs. Through past projects, such as the Redirection project, EBA has experienced that the cost of delivering a comprehensively managed project is about \$10,000 per youth – a fraction of the cost for out-of-home placement. Additional savings accrue to states/societies where lives of youth are 'turned around' and, instead of a life of crime, youth are set on a path of law-abiding citizenship, savings can multiply exponentially. The highly-respected Washington State Institute of Public Policy has estimated the life-time savings to be as high as \$131,000 per youth served by the types of evidence-based, model programs offered by EBA.

Leverage procurement options that lower risk and provide measurable outcomes.

During this unprecedented era of economic challenges, reductions in state revenues and additional burdens on judicial, executive and legislative leaders, traditional approaches to child welfare and juvenile justice must be reconsidered.

Together with key stakeholders, EBA can help provide technical assistance during program planning and development states to determine the best possible approaches for serving a state's at-risk children and youth—regardless of which system that they happen to be involved with at that time. Payment for services can be tied directly to EBA's ability to produce positive results. EBA projects have specific deliverables, performance objectives, outcomes, and timelines, which create us accountable for results. This approach, sometimes known as 'performance-based contracting' (PBC), provides a modern-day solution to a system that is often riddled with waste, inefficiency and dismal outcomes.

A PBC transfers performance risk to EBA and through EBA's oversight, community-based providers are also held accountable for results. EBA will support and work with providers who 'want to get better' but will also discontinue contracts with providers who

consistently demonstrate poor performance and/or low model fidelity. PBCs have a proven history of reducing program costs and increasing desired outcomes. In addition, with a PBC, the savings attained with the programs offered by EBA can, in turn, be reinvested in program expansion – allowing EBA clients to serve more youth and their families with the same amount of (or less) funds.

EBA EXPERIENCE

EBA consists of an experienced group of dedicated professionals who specialize in implementing and managing evidence-based programs that address the unique needs of high-risk children, youth, and families. Collectively, EBA's leadership team has more than 50 years of experience in the fields of child welfare, juvenile justice, and youth and family services—with over 20 years of experience implementing EBPs in real world settings around the world.

EBA's flagship project, the Florida Redirection program, achieved national recognition by earning the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) 2008 National "Science and Service" Award. Redirection was also awarded the Davis Productivity Award, an award given by Florida's TaxWatch organization to recognize businesses whose work significantly, and measurably, increases productivity and promotes innovation to improve the delivery of state services and save money for Florida taxpayers and businesses.

Since then, EBA has provided implementation support to over a dozen counties in Georgia that were previously identified as having committed (incarcerated) high numbers of youth – largely due to the lack of viable, intensive, community-based alternatives. The counties that have partnered with EBA to implement an EBP such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST or Functional Family Therapy (FFT) have seen dramatic reductions in placement rates – far exceeding Governor Deals target reduction of 15%.

In 2017, EBA also helped the Commonwealth of Virginia launch a Transformation Initiative – in partnership with AMIkids and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, among other partners – and create an array of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs statewide. The surge in availability of community-based, evidence-based programs allowed the state to safely return numerous youth to their home and community -- with services to support effective re-entry – and close the largest Juvenile Correctional Center (JCC) in the state later that year. The funds saved from the closing of Beaumont have been reinvested in community-based programs, thus expanding the availability of effective substance abuse and mental health services around the state.

GETTING STARTED

EBA can help states to identify implement "self-funded solutions" like the one in Virginia (described above) that deliver results for client leaders pursuing sustainable reform in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems – "providing the best value at the lowest risk" to state procurement offices – while creating opportunities for reinvestment of savings into the expansion of much-needed services.

EBA is committed to changing the way that the child welfare and juvenile justice system currently operates and believes so strongly in these evidence-based services (and the outcomes generated by them) that EBA are willing to guarantee positive outcomes from the programs we operate.

To learn more about how we can help bring innovative, effective, community-based programs to your state or county, give us a call or send us an email –

dedwards@ebanetwork.com

Dan Edwards, Ph.D. (843) 343-8747

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