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# Progress Report



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## DJJ Prevention Makes Progress; More Analysis and Contract Monitoring Needed

### *at a glance*

The Department of Juvenile Justice is requiring its providers of prevention programs to direct their efforts to high-risk youth from high-risk areas. However, data is not yet available to determine if these targeting strategies are working.

Although the department has taken steps to promote research-based programs to prevention grant applicants, it should restructure its application scoring process so that programs that receive state funding are required to be based on activities that research has proven to be effective.

Approximately 68% of state prevention funds are directed to contracts with The Florida Network, PACE, and Hurricane Island Outward Bound. The department has not followed our recommendation to implement a formal process for monitoring by the Office of Prevention and Victim Services to ensure that the programmatic and fiscal requirements of these contracts are met.

The department should share information on its website about all the prevention activities it funds so that other entities will be aware of them and coordinate with them.

### Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions the Department of Juvenile Justice has taken since our 2002 report, *Justification Review of the Prevention and Victim Services Program*.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Background

The Prevention and Victim Services Program oversees grants and contracts for services to keep at-risk youth from entering the juvenile justice system. Many of these grants and contracts also serve youth that already have a delinquency history, and some program activities provide newly charged delinquents an alternative to the court system. Prevention services include a range of activities, such as boys and girls clubs and after school enrichment and counseling programs.

Approximately 10% of the department's budget, or \$62.6 million, is allocated to the prevention program. The program will also administer \$5.3 million in federal grants in the 2004-05 fiscal year. The prevention program is

<sup>1</sup> Section 11.45(7)(f), *F.S.*

<sup>2</sup> *Justification Review of the Prevention and Victim Services Program of the Department of Juvenile Justice*, [Report No. 02-62](#), November 2002.

largely outsourced: 17 department employees statewide administer service grants and contracts.

## Prior Findings ---

Our 2002 report evaluated the extent to which the department was meeting the three goals it established in its Delinquency Prevention Plan. These goals were

- **targeting** services toward youth at highest risk for delinquency in their communities and targeting funding toward research-based programs;
- increasing the **effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability** of delinquency prevention programs to ensure that program success is proportional to program costs and that program measurements include reliable, valid, and consistent data; and
- **coordinating** prevention efforts to ensure that agencies and partners at various levels of the public and private sectors serve targeted populations to prevent juveniles from committing their first acts of delinquency or becoming chronic offenders.

### *Targeting*

Our 1997 review of the prevention program had found that the department was not directing its prevention resources to high-risk youth. At the time of our 2002 review, the program had made progress by requiring providers to serve high-risk youth from high-risk areas of the state.<sup>3</sup> However, the department could not determine the extent to which providers were complying with these requirements. We recommended that the

department analyze project information to determine whether the providers were meeting the requirement to serve high-risk youth from high-risk zip codes.

The department had started drawing on national research on the effectiveness of various prevention programs to select and develop prevention activities in Florida. To assess the success of its strategies, we recommended that the department analyze key aspects of its programs, including the types of risk factors addressed by the projects it funds, how the project services compared with the needs presented by high-risk youth, and what the correlations are between program offerings, youth risk factors, and recidivism. We also recommended that the department continue to incorporate new research into program development. For example, research suggests that the department consider funding more activities that include family participation and that serve younger children.

### *Effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability*

Earlier reviews had found that the program had failed to establish fundamental processes to control the disbursement of prevention grant funds. The department had taken several actions to address these deficiencies, but our 2002 review noted areas the department still needed to address. We recommended that the department require program managers to review and approve monitoring reports that include corrective action plans so that managers are aware of program deficiencies. In addition, we recommended that the department revise its draft manual to fully address federally funded projects and shift the basis for payment of federal grants from deliverables to services provided to enhance provider accountability. We also recommended that the department finalize and adopt the draft policies and procedures manual by January 2003.

Three large state contracts, PACE, the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services, and Hurricane Island Outward Bound, received

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<sup>3</sup> High-risk youth had to have problems in at least two of four areas that nearly all prevention literature identifies as important: community, family, school, or individual/peer. In addition, projects were to serve youth living in high-risk zip codes. The department mapped delinquency referrals and identified 335 zip codes as high-risk areas.

over \$41.9 million for the 2002-03 fiscal year, or 68% of the program's appropriations. Although the department had established an accountability system for prevention grants, as described above, it had not developed a similar process for these prevention contracts. We recommended that the department establish a formal process to ensure that the programmatic and fiscal requirements of the contracts are met.

We also noted that the program data was unreliable and could not be used for program management or legislative performance budgeting. We recommended that the department address data in its policies and procedures manual and its monitoring tool to ensure that providers enter required data in the Juvenile Justice Information System and that the information entered is reliable and valid.

### ***Coordinating prevention across agencies***

The department was interacting with other prevention providers on an informal, ad hoc basis. We concluded that it should increase coordination efforts to ensure that agencies and partners in the public and private sectors target programs effectively. We also recommended that the department hold quarterly meetings with other state agencies involved in prevention activities to share information and coordinate state prevention policy. We also recommended that on its website the department describe all projects that receive department prevention funding to allow other entities involved in prevention to be aware of and coordinate their efforts.

## **Current Status** \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Data is not yet available to determine if targeting strategies are working***

The department is working with providers to capture information on whether program participants are high risk youth from high-risk areas as required. However, the department is not yet able to rely on this data for

management and legislative reporting because some providers have not routinely entered data or have entered it incorrectly.

Due to these data limitations, the department has not implemented our recommendation to analyze key aspects of its programs, including the types of risk factors addressed by the projects it funds, how the project services compared with the needs presented by high-risk youth, and what the correlations are between program offerings, youth risk factors, and recidivism. We continue to believe that department staff should ensure that providers enter required data in the Juvenile Justice Information System and verify that the information entered is reliable and valid. The department should analyze this data to evaluate program compliance with contract requirements and assess the resulting impact on program participants.

### ***The department should fund programs that are research-based***

While the department has begun to implement our recommendation to apply new research to its selection and funding of delinquency prevention programs, it should do more. The department now includes links to research on its website, in its grant applications, and discusses the benefits of research-based activities in its training for providers. However, during the grant funding process, reviewers can award only 10 points maximum, out of a possible total of 145 points, for applicants implementing research-based activities. We believe the department should restructure its scoring process to emphasize research-based programs so that the state funds new approaches and activities that have been proven to be effective.

### ***Improvements have been made to program accountability and effectiveness***

The department has implemented several of our recommendations to improve accountability. It has adopted a *Delinquency Prevention Program Management Policy and*

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*Procedures Manual* that includes federally funded grant project requirements. The department also has required field staff to notify their managers of corrective action plans so that the managers would be aware of program deficiencies.

However, the department has not implemented our recommendation to shift the basis for payment for federally funded grants from deliverables to services provided to enhance provider accountability. The department has given the responsibility for the review and approval of invoices on federal grants to the field prevention specialists who also monitor the delivery of program services. By shifting this review process from the central office to field staff, the department believes it has provided effective accountability for these projects by linking project payment to project activities and monitoring. We believe that basing payment on services rather than deliverables would further strengthen accountability.

The department has not implemented our recommendation to set up a system to monitor the three large prevention contracts, similar to the process it uses for prevention grants. While the department has revised the contracts to require the providers to do more self-monitoring, we continue to believe that the department should implement a formal process for monitoring by the Office of Prevention and Victim Services to ensure that the programmatic and fiscal requirements of the contracts are met.

## ***Coordinating prevention activities across agencies remains ad hoc***

The department has not implemented our recommendation to improve coordination among agencies active in prevention. While the department interacts with other agencies on an ad hoc basis, it has not set up routine meetings to share information and coordinate state policy. The department also has not listed on its website all projects that receive department prevention funding. Such a list would allow other entities to be aware of these activities, coordinate with them or make appropriate referrals to them, and potentially confer on how to help their own programs be more successful. We continue to believe that the department should share information on its website about all its prevention activities so as to enhance delinquency prevention statewide.

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