

## Getting “Smart” on Juvenile Justice: Implementing Statewide Reforms

Since 2014, six states have launched innovative efforts with assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to build on legislative reforms aimed at addressing the poor outcomes and high costs of their juvenile justice systems. Through data-driven implementation, these states have already begun to put in place customized policies and practices to better serve youth and their communities.

In October 2014, OJJDP selected **Georgia, Hawaii, and Kentucky** as the inaugural states to receive intensive and tailored assistance from the Crime and Justice Institute at Community Resources for Justice (CJI) to implement legislative reforms as part of the *Smart on Juvenile Justice: A Comprehensive Strategy to Juvenile Justice Reform Initiative*. OJJDP later selected **South Dakota, West Virginia, and Kansas** also to receive assistance. CJI helps the six states achieve four main implementation goals:

1. Increase capacity within the states to sustain reforms;
2. Implement objective decision making tools;
3. Enhance community-based alternatives to out-of-home placement; and,
4. Support performance measurement, oversight, and reinvestment.

Smart on Juvenile Justice States	
Georgia Hawaii Kentucky	October 2014
South Dakota West Virginia	November 2015
Kansas	May 2016

### Prioritizing System Reform

Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Kansas were selected as *Smart on Juvenile Justice* states because of their bold and comprehensive efforts to transform their juvenile justice systems. All six states had recently passed legislation to address high costs, poor outcomes, and over-reliance on the confinement of youth in residential facilities or other out-of-home placements, and reinvest in more effective and cost-efficient methods of supervision and rehabilitation that allow youth to remain in the community.

The states’ legislative reforms share the same overarching goals of reducing out-of-home placements, increasing community-based treatment and services, and improving outcomes for youth. CJI provides targeted implementation assistance to address the unique characteristics and challenges of each state:

- **Georgia** had already put in place numerous community-based programs at the time it became a *Smart on Juvenile Justice* state and was seeking to evaluate how effectively those programs were implemented. The state has since given every judicial circuit access to an evidence-based intervention option in the community with a well-established process to ensure effective implementation of those programs.

- **Hawaii**, with its unique geographic location, demographic composition, and cultural characteristics, embarked on implementing greater system uniformity despite having its four major counties separated by water. For the first time, the state put in place a statewide risk and needs assessment tool to better determine the individual needs and best services for youth in the juvenile justice system.
- **Kentucky** sought to expand its diversion program and established multi-disciplinary teams to reduce formal court involvement, while helping support successful youth outcomes. Today, those teams have been established in all districts across the state to support youth in diversion programs.
- **South Dakota** set out to examine ways to improve outcomes for Native American children involved in its juvenile justice system. The state has since established a Native American Focus Group comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders who work, or have worked, in tribal and non-tribal settings to develop recommendations for achieving that goal.
- **West Virginia** needed to expand its Youth Reporting Centers and deliberately wanted to ground both the existing and new centers in research and best practices. Now, all the centers have been evaluated and the state is developing a new operational framework to bring uniformity throughout the state.
- **Kansas** wanted to ensure that its risk assessment tool was being implemented consistently by staff across multiple agencies. The state has since created a quality assurance plan to strengthen all agencies' use of the tool.

These are just a sampling of the states' implementation priorities and, if these states are able to effectively implement programs and practices to address these and other priority areas, the reforms will reduce recidivism, protect public safety, and provide youth with greater opportunities for success.

### Implementation Strategy: Turning Policy into Practice

CJI prides itself on partnering with states to build buy-in, develop strong partnerships across stakeholders, and increase in-state capacity so they can continue to effectively implement legislative reforms after the technical assistance period has ended. CJI had the advantage of having previously worked in Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, South Dakota, West Virginia and Kansas by helping inter-branch, bipartisan task forces or working groups study their juvenile justice systems and develop policies as part of the prior legislative reforms. This continuity helped ensure a smooth transition into implementation.

CJI's implementation assistance work with states includes:

- Targeted training initiatives, implementation and validation of assessment tools to understand risk and needs of youth, and development of graduated response systems to extinguish antisocial behavior and reinforce prosocial behavior to make community supervision more effective in holding youth accountable;
- Development of quality assurance plans, policies and procedures to ensure sustainability of evidence-based programs and practices;
- Data analysis and establishment of performance measures and fiscal tracking systems to help states monitor the impact of their reforms and build upon effective policies; and,
- Engagement of stakeholders to problem solve policies that may not be working optimally and, most importantly, to share successes.

With the combination of demonstrated in-state commitment and CJI's technical assistance, the reforms in the *Smart on Juvenile Justice* states can have a lasting and positive impact on the lives of youth and their families and on the field of juvenile justice.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: TESSA UPIN, SENIOR ASSOCIATE, CRIME AND JUSTICE INSTITUTE AT CRJ AT [TUPIN@CRJ.ORG](mailto:TUPIN@CRJ.ORG) OR 617-366-7284

*This project was supported by Grant # 2014-ZB-BX-K011 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.*