

Youth Villages' Ongoing Outcome Evaluation Process

Youth Villages' outcome evaluation process was designed to determine the impact of our programs on the children and families we serve. This process was developed internally in order to provide the agency and program leadership with information that is used for program monitoring and improvement. None of our contracts or funders requires such an extensive outcome evaluation process.

The process has been evaluated by Dr. Richard Barth, currently Dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland; Dr. Barth is a widely-known and well-respected researcher in the fields of child welfare and children's mental health. Together, we published three articles in peer-reviewed journals detailing findings on the outcomes of our services as well as factors that impact long-term outcomes.

The process is designed to collect outcome data at admission, discharge and at six, twelve, and 24 months post-discharge. Our methodology is based on best practices within the survey research field; we are constantly scanning new literature in an effort to continuously improve our data collection processes.

Features of our outcome evaluation process include the following:

- All youth who receive at least 60 days of service are followed at all post-discharge points, regardless of their status at discharge.
 - To determine the outcomes of interest following services, we believe the appropriate method involves assessing only youth who received at least a minimum dose of services
 - The percent of youth who receive less than 60 days of service is always reported along with our outcomes; this figure is monitored for each program/location through our Core Indicator process so that program leadership can make adjustments to the referral and/or engagement and alignment processes as needed.
- Data focus on behavioral and functional indicators that are important to our vision of helping children and families live successfully. We collect data on placement, custody, school status, negative involvement with the justice system, and out-of-home placements; for older youth we also ask about employment, pregnancy, and parenting.
- Surveys are completed with youth/families who have discharged from YV services altogether. If a youth re-enters YV services, the survey cycle is reset, beginning again with their new discharge date; the percent of youth who have re-entered services is reported along with the outcomes.
- Post-discharge data collection occurs mostly through phone surveys, although we also use mail and electronic surveys to reach families.
 - We use texting to reach families who may have limited minutes of talk on their phones or who have text-only cell phones
 - Extensive internet searches are conducted to find hard-to-locate families for follow-up surveys
 - Social media, such as Facebook, is used to contact families who cannot otherwise be reached; strict policies designed to protect personal health information have been implemented so that the confidentiality is maintained for children and families
- Although no consensus exists regarding adequate response rates, 40%-60% has been identified as appropriate for surveys of this type and size (Public Works and Government Services Canada. (2008). *Advisory Panel on Telephone Public Opinion Survey Quality: Standards and Guidelines for Response Rate*).
 - We report response rates at each time period; although response rates differ somewhat by location and population, they are nearly always within the appropriate range.
 - While appropriate response rates are important, it is more important that the data be free of response bias. We have done extensive analysis to detect response bias within our survey respondent pool and have found that the survey respondents generally resemble the population on demographic (age, gender, race/ethnicity) and program characteristics (length of service, discharge status).