



MISSOURI
YOUTH
SERVICES
INSTITUTE



Photo courtesy of "Like Any Other Kid".

THE MISSOURI YOUTH SERVICES INSTITUTE (MYSI)
APPROACH FOR
POSITIVE JUVENILE
JUSTICE SYSTEM OUTCOMES

The Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) Approach for Positive Juvenile Justice System Outcomes

THE MYSI APPROACH

The Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) employs a therapeutic group treatment approach, which utilizes components of positive youth development and cognitive behavioral therapy to help youth make positive and long-lasting changes. These therapeutic components are delivered to youth in a fully integrated treatment team approach where social-emotional competencies are learned and practiced.

The therapeutic process utilized by MYSI addresses two issues directly related to youth in juvenile justice systems. First is the cognitive therapies that are needed to address the adolescent's faulty beliefs and thinking errors which lead to impulsive and harmful choices. By examining their beliefs in a safe and supportive environment young people learn how their behavior impacts others. Through problem solving skills and reflective thinking, they learn to make healthier choices and relationship decisions.

The second issue relates to the cycle of abuse and trauma commonly referred to the “trauma outcome process”. Once again in a safe and supportive environment as the staff and group discuss these issues they often find common ground and understanding of how they and others were impacted by these experiences. The focus is on the strengths developed to survive and recognize triggers, contain reactions and resolve their traumatic experiences to the best of their ability. This process becomes empowering by developing coping skills and an improvement in their ability to trust and form healthier relationships.

The MYSI approach is based on the award-winning Missouri Approach where youth stay together in small groups with the same staff and are treated in a humane and nurturing environment. The MYSI Approach establishes an organizational structure with clear lines of authority that empower and enhance accountability throughout the organization—from the director to the direct care staff—for effective implementation of the program. The therapeutic group approach is designed to keep youth safe and secure during their rehabilitative process and to reduce the number of youth that recidivate.

Cover Photo:

Mark D. Steward, Founder and Director of Missouri Youth Services Institute, speaks with a resident at a youth facility

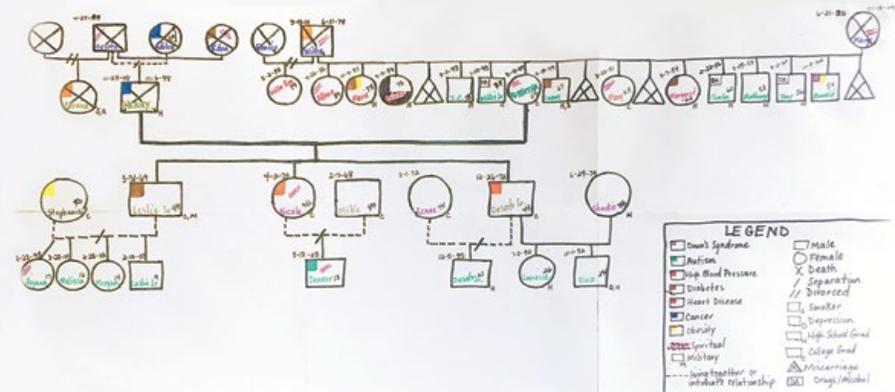
The following beliefs serve as a basis for treatment programming within the MYSI Approach:

The MYSI approach is based on the belief that in order for youth to truly achieve long-lasting change and avoid re-offending, they must go through a process of self-exploration and a change process that addresses their history and family dynamics, and how those elements have influenced their present situation.

8. People are a combination of their past and present.

Youth have learned through a wide variety of experiences before they enter the agency. Often, their perceived negative behavior could have been a very natural response to their particular situation or family system. Additionally, a youth's reactions to a given situation are frequently

based on perceptions from a much earlier stage of life and their experience at that time. Investigation of these perceptions may facilitate the change process.



A "genogram" depicting the history of an individual's biological and familial history

9. **All behavior has a purpose.** Even the most delinquent behavior is goal directed. It is either a conscious or unconscious (aware or unaware) attempt to get needs met. Our treatment approach is designed to help youth meet those needs by helping them investigate and understand their behavior and its effects, and to explore healthier alternatives.

10. **People need a sense of self-worth.** Improved self-esteem is an important aspect of the therapeutic process for youth. To maximize the opportunity for youth to be successful in our programs, as well as on the streets, we must take every opportunity to enhance the youth's self-esteem.

11. **Effective juvenile justice must be a balanced approach.** Effective juvenile justice systems should balance public safety, prevention and treatment. Treatment should be a seamless continuum of care from time of commitment to discharge in which youths' needs are met in a safe, structured environment with well-trained, caring staff who help them identify and address their issues.

12. **Human dignity is a basic value.** Human dignity goes beyond the basics of honor or respect to the essence of being human. It is reacting to the human dimension of every person. Human dignity is accorded to a person in as much as he or she is a person.

DIGNIFIED & UNDIGNIFIED BEHAVIOR	
DIGNITY	LACK OF DIGNITY
Trust	Humiliation
Listening	Scorn
Dialogue	Condescension
Empathy	Ignoring
A good word	Shouting
Consideration	Undermining other's confidence
Offering assistance	Blaming
Decency	Moralizing

FUNDAMENTALS

of the MYSI Approach

1. **Small, Non-Institutional Facilities Close to Home**

- Groups of 10-12 youth stay together with the same staff team at the same facility throughout the treatment process.
- The system may be divided by regions, with small, residential programs and different levels of care.
- The regions should try to ensure youth are no more than two hours from home.
- Facilities are designed to resemble home with comfortable “dayrooms,” shared, open sleeping dorms and walls adorned with artwork, motivational slogans and other appropriate items.



A Missouri style dormitory, which provides a homelike environment for supporting a therapeutic group process

2. **Integrated Treatment: Treating the Whole Person**

- Youth participate in a highly structured daily schedule focused on building healthy peer-to-peer and adult-to-youth relationships.
- Youth explore and develop self-awareness, insight, skills and leadership as they work on resolving core issues and attaining behavioral change.
- Predictable daily group meetings such as group circles and treatment activities keep youth involved in the group process.
- Youth are provided with educational and recreational opportunities, and encouraged to develop leadership skills.
- The program supports regular engagement with family and the community.

3. **Individual Care Within a Group Treatment Model**

- Small groups of 10-12 youth stay together at all times throughout the program (sleeping, eating, school, group meetings, chores, etc.)
- Groups check in regularly and meet daily for formal group treatment.
- Each youth has an individualized treatment team (group leader, service coordinator, one-on-one staff, teachers, etc.) that meets weekly to assess each youth's progress through stages of development and readiness for release.

4. **Safety through Supervision, Structure and Relationships**

- Staff members are educated, culturally diverse and committed to helping youth make positive and lasting changes.
- Constant, active supervision of youth by staff (24/7 “eyes-on, ears-on supervision”) provides a secure, safe environment.
- The highly structured program schedule, including group meetings, school and activities, fosters responsibility and keeps youth engaged in the process.
- Appropriate, caring relationships between staff and youth encourage interpersonal accountability.

The principles on which the MYSI approach are founded address the whole person as a strategy for long term success - rather than punitive measures alone, which only offer short term results if any at all.

5. Integrated Treatment and Education

- Education is highly valued and supported within the treatment plan.
- Youth attend most of their general education classes together with their respective groups on a daily basis, with exceptions for special education and GED, college and vocational education courses, which youth may attend individually or with other groups.
- Youth specialists or on-line staff for each group provide support to teachers in the classroom and monitor the individual needs and progress of youth.
- Teachers and other classroom staff are members of each youth's individual treatment team.



In the MYSI approach, the education experience is a crucial part of the overall treatment plan

6. Families and Communities as Partners in Treatment

- Families are engaged in treatment as soon as a youth enters into a program.
- The program provides time for regular family visiting hours and communication each week.
- Family therapy is provided to help families and youth work through issues.
- Families are considered integral partners in planning for the youth's release and transition home.

7. Support from Transition through Aftercare

- One case manager (service coordinator) is assigned to each youth at intake and monitors the youth's progress from entry to transition home.
- An individualized service plan (ISP) guides the youth's progress during placement.
- Transitional planning begins at entry, intensifies prior to release and continues through aftercare.
- The period of aftercare depends on each youth's individual plan and needs.

PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

Move beyond traditional correctional models

Develop new approaches from best practices

Create safe environments

Help youth realize positive and lasting changes

Improve staff effectiveness and enhance skills

Facilitate youth skills and personal growth

Reduce recidivism and critical incidents

Involve families and communities

Utilize evidence-based systems to get results

Implementation COMPONENTS

Implementing the MYSI approach requires a significant commitment throughout a system to helping youth make positive, long-lasting changes. Facilitating small group interactions and processes, and promoting healthy, productive relationships and interactions are at the center of MYSI's group therapeutic approach and must be administered by caring, well-trained staff members. Additionally, facilities must be conducive to facilitating successful treatment programs. The following core components are critical for implementation:

Organizational Structure/Staffing Requirements

- Operationalizing the MYSI approach requires a unit management organizational structure. Unit management is assigning a specific treatment team of staff to work only with one group of youth. This structure enables the staff to consistently work with the same group of youth and develop therapeutic relationships with their respective group.

Group Therapeutic Treatment

- Effective group engagement and facilitation allows staff to create an atmosphere where youth are encouraged and supported to explore the roots of their past and current behaviors, develop and test new behaviors, practice healthy interactions, build relationships, and use the here and now to heal old wounds. Under this approach, it is imperative that staff provides enough structure and boundaries to ensure a safe and trusting group environment to increase the likelihood of success on any given task.



A facilitated group session is a key part of providing rehabilitation

Facility Environment

- MYSI standards recommend a facility size to accommodate four groups with a total of 40-48 youth. This size is ideal, but in many cases, the facility size is significantly increased because of the existing, available facility. The facility should have living units that resemble dorms versus individual cells. Additionally, it should have a more open layout to better facilitate awareness supervision and group interaction. Additional facility standards to facilitate the group treatment process and ensure youth safety are also necessary.



A Missouri style dorm room



A correctional dorm room

The MYSI PROCESS

MYSI initiates the following process in response to a potential client's inquiry regarding assistance. The purpose is to determine the interest, needs and resources of an organization and inform the potential design and implementation of the organizational change process.

Pre-Assessment Phase

Our team meets with organizational leaders to identify *interest, issues, strengths and challenges* and discuss the basics of the MYSI approach.

Site Visit:

We visit the site to evaluate the programs, assess the facilities and conduct interviews with staff and youth.

Leadership Overview:

Our team presents an in-depth overview of the MYSI approach and facilitates discussion regarding implementation implications.

Assessment of System

The MYSI team outlines key components and conducts ongoing assessments initially and throughout the transformation process with the following areas of focus: organizational vision, mission and beliefs, leadership capacity responsiveness, accountability and communication, safety factors, organizational structure, staffing patterns and dynamics, training, treatment program, physical plant, integration of services, data and community engagement.

Implementation Plan

Based on the assessment process, we engage the organization's leadership and designated staff in a strategic planning process to outline the implementation of the new approach.

The process includes addressing critical factors such as

- Identification of a start-up group
- Developing policies to reflect the new approach
- Training leadership and staff
- Coaching at various levels of the organization to help move a system from theory to practice.

The coaching component is an integral part of the change process and incorporates hands-on assistance, on-site observation and modeling to frontline staff, as well as ongoing consultation, feedback and recommendations to various levels of management.



Dr. Pili Robinson, MYSI Director of Consulting Services, has made supporting youth his life's work

History of MYSI and the Missouri Approach

Nearly four decades ago, Missouri made dramatic changes to its juvenile justice system. The state moved from a correctional approach plagued with physical and emotional abuse, violence, suicides and escapes, to a rehabilitative, therapeutic group approach that produced positive outcomes for both the system and youth.

The new program utilized a peer approach guided by trained staff that worked with groups of youth in smaller, regionally based facilities that treated youth closer to home and encouraged family involvement. It emphasized rehabilitation, treatment and education to equip youth with skills and accountability to make internal, long-lasting changes. The drastic reduction in escapes and violence combined with significant improvements in education and recidivism had a dramatic and positive impact on both the system and the outcomes for youth.

During the past four decades, Missouri has utilized this same basic approach with gradual improvements along the way. Its evidence-based results are exceptional, unbiased and nonpartisan. For years, Missouri outcomes show lower recidivism rates, higher educational achievements and safer facilities.

MYSI Director and founder Mark Steward was one of the first counselors for the pilot program in 1970 that helped set Missouri on the course for positive change. He served as Director of the Division of Youth Services for 17 years, where he played an integral role in the development, implementation and improvement of the Missouri juvenile justice system, known nationally as The Missouri Approach. He launched MYSI following his retirement in 2005 to assist jurisdictions across the nation interested in implementing a therapeutic group treatment approach. He and his team of seasoned staff members have decades of experience in youth services—and specifically with the Missouri Approach.



Mark D. Steward, Founder and Director of Missouri Youth Services Institute

“For anyone honestly seeking to transform their juvenile justice system from a correctional model to a positive youth development model, there is no group better than MYSI to help effect that change. MYSI staff truly understood the dynamics of making the kind of huge cultural change in an entrenched system.



They handled their technical assistance/training/coaching role with great skill and sensitivity. We would have come nowhere near as far as we did in our reform efforts without MYSI.”

- Vincent N. Schiraldi

- Senior research fellow, Harvard Kennedy school of government, program in criminal justice policy and management.
- NYC- Commissioner, New York City Department of Probation (2010-2015)
- DC - Director, Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (2005-2009)

About the MISSOURI YOUTH SERVICES INSTITUTE (MYSI)

MYSI is a nonprofit organization created to assist juvenile justice systems across the country with reform efforts. Our team is uniquely positioned to help jurisdictions move from a traditional correctional model toward a rehabilitative, therapeutic approach with significantly better outcomes.

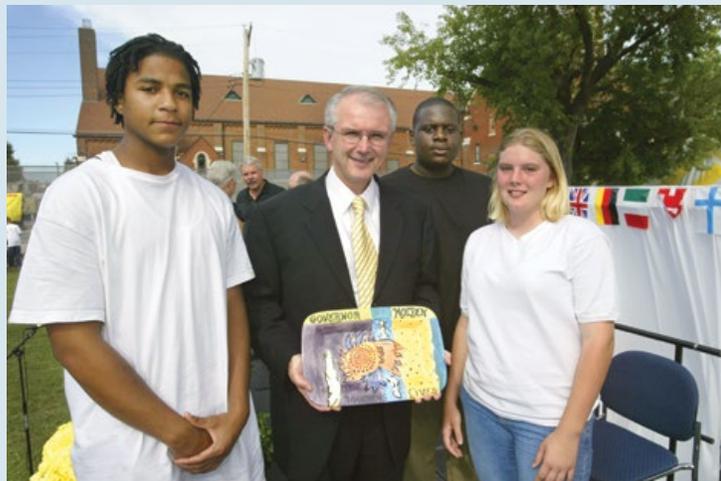
MYSI is the only juvenile justice consulting group in the country that provides in-depth, customized services based on years of experience with the successful Missouri Approach, resulting in comprehensive and systemic changes to juvenile justice systems. Our dynamic team offers unmatched experience, knowledge and dedication to our clients. We work with state, local and private entities to implement juvenile justice programs that produce positive, long-term results



MYSI Team

“Our youth reflect who we are and what our future will become. During my term as Governor I often attended events sponsored by the Missouri Division of Youth Services. One such event was the multi-cultural event in St. Louis, Mo. Another very special event occurred when Lori and I invited 50 young Missourians and their staff to the Governor’s Mansion to celebrate the holiday season. We believed then, as we do now, that our juvenile justice system will shape their future and ours.”

- Bob Holden
Governor of Missouri, 2001-2005



Governor Bob Holden attends a multi-cultural event in St. Louis

Evidence-Based Practice for

SUCCESSFUL

Outcomes

Performance measures in the Missouri Division of Youth Services (Missouri Approach) clearly indicate the MYSI/Missouri approach works.

Safer Facilities for Youth & Staff:

- ✓ **Youth** are **4 ½ times less likely to be assaulted** in Missouri's system than in other systems
- ✓ **Staff** members are **13 times less likely to be assaulted** than in other systems
- ✓ **Isolation** is used **200 times less** in Missouri than in other systems

(Source: Research by Dick Mendel (2009) comparing Missouri Division of Youth Services with youth correctional programs participating in the Performance Based Standards Process.)

Lower Recidivism Rates:

7% of youth released from Missouri's Division of Youth Services are either recommitted to the juvenile justice system or incarcerated in Missouri's prisons three years after discharge *compared to* rates from **20-70%** in other states.



Higher Educational Achievements:

95% of youth earn high school credits *compared to* **50%** nationally

30% of youth earn a GED or high school diploma *compared to*

87% of youth improved in reading and math *compared to* **72%** nationally



21% nationally

MYSI CLIENTS

MYSI has assisted the following jurisdictions in various capacities:

- Louisiana
- New Mexico
- New York State and New York City
- Washington, DC
- San Francisco, CA
- Santa Clara County, CA
- Cayman Islands
- Virginia

Additionally, through a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, MYSI has facilitated tours to Missouri's Division of Youth Services facilities and provided written materials, publications and guidance to more than 25 states across the nation.



MYSI COMMITMENT

When an organization is committed to meaningful reform of its juvenile justice system, MYSI is here to help—every step of the way. Our team provides comprehensive, customized consulting services to help take our clients through the entire change process from initial interest and assessment to planning and implementation to education and training to staff considerations to ongoing feedback and monitoring.



MYSI trainer, Charles Galbreath, provides training to staff in New York City's Administration for Children's Services.

MYSI consultants work side by side with facility staff to train, coach and model the MYSI approach. They work with facility administrators and mid-management to help establish oversight of the therapeutic group treatment process. Our staff don't just come in and give a training course and leave, but are on the ground daily, weekly and monthly to help implement the MYSI Approach.

Our coaching service incorporates hands-on assistance, on-site observation and modeling to frontline staff, as well as ongoing consultation, feedback and recommendations to various levels of management. Our team members help our clients work through issues one day at a time to help ensure success.

But, our commitment goes deeper by integrating a unique coaching component into the change process.

JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM: *Making the “Missouri Model” an American Model*

The state of Missouri has created a juvenile justice system that has proved so successful over the last thirty years it's known as the “Missouri Miracle.” A number of practices combine to make Missouri's system unique: It's primarily made up of small facilities, generally designed for between ten and thirty youths, located at sites throughout the state that keep young people close to their own homes. These facilities don't look like jails with traditional cells; there are only eight isolation rooms in the entire state, which are seldom used and only for emergency situations. They feature a highly trained and educated staff working in teams with small groups of youths. Youths are treated with respect and dignity, and instead of more traditional correctional approaches, the system uses a rehabilitative and therapeutic model that works towards teaching the young people to make positive, lasting changes in their behavior. The result has been some of the best outcomes in the nation: fewer than 8% of the youths in the Missouri system return again after their release, and fewer than 8% go on to adult prison. One-third of the youths return to their communities with a high school diploma or GED, and another 50% successfully return to school.

Missouri's results have been so positive that Mark Steward, the visionary former director of the Missouri Division of Youth Services, founded the Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) to help other jurisdictions across the country do what Missouri has done...The Missouri model is already being studied and replicated successfully in other cities and states including Washington, D.C.; San Jose, California; New Mexico; and Louisiana.

One of the most persistent roadblocks to juvenile justice reform across the country is resistance to change. Too many officials cling to the belief that citizens think existing punitive juvenile systems with facilities

and cultures that resemble adult prisons are “where these kids deserve to be.” But when you ask people whether they want young people who have gone through the juvenile justice system to come out better or worse at the end, the answer is clear. They understand that abusive and punitive approaches often lead youths to the adult criminal system. New York State's abusive youth prisons have an 89 percent recidivism rate for boys and cost \$210,000 a youth – a one-year equivalent of 4 years at Harvard – to produce an adult criminal.

Statistics already show Missouri is one of the few states achieving this goal. We need a system that returns young people to the community prepared to succeed and become productive adults to serve as a model for the entire nation. We don't need systems that do further harm and return youths, most of them nonviolent offenders, back to their communities hopeless, angry, and unprepared to succeed in life.

By Marian Wright Edelman

President of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council



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