

A Charter on
Competency Development
Helping Youth Realize Their Potential



Developed in collaboration by the
Dane County Department of Human Services
Dane County Juvenile Court Programs
Community Partnerships, Inc.
Family Service, Inc.
Youth Services of Southern Wisconsin, Inc.
Horizon House

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INTRODUCTION

Competency Development is one of the three pillars of the Balanced and Restorative Justice model that guides services for youth in the juvenile system in Dane County. In 1997, a Report on Competency Development identified core competencies and practice principles as a foundation to competency development for youth in the juvenile system. In 2007, the Delinquency Supervision Coordinating Team (the interdisciplinary coordinating body for work in the juvenile justice system) formed a work group on competency development to continue the task begun in 1997. The work group included representatives from all areas of the juvenile justice system with extensive experience and expertise in system administration, social work, foster and group home care delivery and service provision.

Overall vision: *To create an integrated process of competency development in the juvenile justice system that will help youth acquire the skills and competencies needed to succeed in adulthood, to become valued members of the community, and to ultimately reduce the reoccurrence of juvenile arrests in the community.*

Specific goals for an integrated competency development system are to:

- Enhance the level of coordination and communication between service providers by using uniform assessment and reporting formats.
- Foster youth awareness and self-development.
- Increase the quality of care for youth/families through enhanced communication and greater overall coordination.
- Direct youth to the most appropriate service available and focus service efforts on enhancing youth skills and strengths necessary to become successful.
- Develop a research-based system.
- Gather outcome data on competency development to inform policy and practice.

The core competencies, guiding principles and implementation plans identified in this charter have been adopted by the Delinquency Supervision Coordinating Team and the Child, Youth and Family Division of the Department of Human Services to serve as the framework for competency development in Dane County.

OVERVIEW OF THE BALANCED AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MODEL

The Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ) model to working with youth involved in the juvenile system focuses on three equally important areas:

1. **Accountability:** This aspect of BARJ emphasizes youth understanding the harm caused to the victim and the community by their behavior and their active participation in repairing/restoring the damage done.
2. **Community Protection (Safety):** This aspect of BARJ emphasizes public protection. In the short run, supervision strategies may be utilized to “monitor” or control youth behavior. In the long run, it includes strategies that promote responsible behavior on the part of the youth.
3. **Competency Development:** This aspect of BARJ emphasizes youth development and the belief that youth should exit the juvenile justice system more competent than when they entered.

Goals and individualized plans are developed in the area of Accountability, Community Protection and Competency Development in every case. Discreet intervention strategies may focus on one of these goals, but the overall plan is most effective when all three areas are addressed.

The Balanced and Restorative Justice model is founded on the belief that justice is best served when the *victim, community, and youth who committed the offense* are viewed as equally important participants in the process. All must receive fair and balanced attention, be actively involved in the justice process, and gain tangible benefits from their interactions with the juvenile justice system.

COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

The Competency Development component of BARJ is most often defined in the literature as “the ability to do something that is valued by others in the community.” This suggests a system response that is more than the remediation of problematic behaviors, but a response that helps youth acquire the skills needed to be successful in life and valued by their community. Competency development is most effective with the identification and enhancement of *existing competencies* and not solely on the identification of incompetence or skill deficiencies.

Competency development focuses on creating expectations and opportunities for youth to successfully perform and be recognized for pro-social behavior. The definition of pro-social focuses on two basic elements: (1) Actions, behaviors, and activities; and (2) Social settings, society, community, and others. As such, the competencies that are observable behaviors in a social setting that other people find useful, helpful, or valuable are the most likely to become an integrated part of the youth’s skill repertoire. It is not limited to attitudes, skills, or behaviors that solely benefit or enhance the youth.

Competency is best achieved when youth fulfill roles that actively contribute to the quality of life of their families, neighborhoods, schools, and community. It is our responsibility to provide opportunities for youth to perform these roles and receive the support and recognition they deserve in doing so.

CORE COMPETENCIES

The core competencies are based on the 40 Developmental Assets model of the Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota and on research in the restorative justice field. The 40 Developmental Assets reflect the experiences, relationships, opportunities, environmental factors, personal attributes and skills that young people need to become caring and responsible adults. The model is grounded in research on child and adolescent development, risk prevention and resiliency. Since 1990, the Search Institute has surveyed over 250,000 students in grades 6-12 revealing that assets are powerful influences in promoting positive behavior and reducing the risk for problem behavior. The hallmark of asset development is about building relationships, developing competencies and providing support to youth.

Although all 40 assets are important, several “core” assets or competencies will be the focus of the response for youth involved in the juvenile justice system in Dane County. These core competencies include the following:

1. Social Competencies:
 - Life Skills
 - Employment/Work Skills
 - Social/Interpersonal Skills
2. Commitment to Learning & Education
3. Constructive Use of Time
4. Support from family, community or other adult relationships
5. Empowerment of youth to be active in their community

By focusing on the core competencies in an integrated and coordinated service delivery effort, every youth involved in the juvenile system will have an opportunity to enhance their abilities and identify areas for continued focus after leaving the system. Behavioral benchmarks for each core competency are listed in Appendix A.

PRINCIPLES

The following principles serve as the foundation to effective competency development practice:

- **All youth have both needs and strengths.**
- **Family involvement is key to successful competency development.** Given the time limits to a youth’s involvement in the system or any given program, educating and empowering the parent or caregiver to be the facilitator of competency development for their child is critical.
- **Youth assessment must include strengths, skills, experiences, aptitudes, knowledge, and interests** so that youth and others recognize their current abilities and previous accomplishments.
- **Competency development and treatment/therapy work in concert of each other.** Therapy typically addresses mental health, AODA, learning disabilities and/or other barriers to competency development. Competency development provides youth with experiences and skills typically not offered through therapy. Although at times distinct, therapy may include elements of competency development and competency development may have a therapeutic impact.
- **Youth are perceived as potential resources to the community, not as inherent problems to be isolated from the community.**
- **Desired competencies for youth who have committed delinquencies are no different than those desired for youth who have not.** While there may be differences in experiences, abilities, and/or supports among youth who have committed delinquencies vs. those who have not, youth rise to the level of expectations set by caring adults. We must set expectations for all youth that encourage success and achievement at school, home and in the community.
- **A competency-based approach requires a focus on both short-term (skill acquisition and practice) and long-term (maintenance) strategies.** The success of a competency development

approach depends on the ability of someone to “teach” a skill **and** on the ability of a youth to integrate that skill into his/her behavior and choose to use it in appropriate situations. A competency-based approach is most successful when we help youth formulate their long and short-term goals.

- **Youth learn best by doing.** Efforts to develop competencies in youth must include opportunities for them to **apply** the skills desired, recognition for the successful demonstration of these skills, and support to learn from the practice of these skills throughout the process.
- **Opportunities to demonstrate and practice these skills must be applied in “real life” settings.** Youth must be supported in efforts to use and practice these skills in “real” settings, i.e. in school, on the job, in interactions with others, and so on. The closer these settings are to the settings in which youth must **actualize** their skills, the more likely it is that the behaviors/skills will be internalized, retained and used in the future.
- **To be most effective, families, schools, youth centers, businesses, service organizations, the faith communities must be active partners.** The partners must work together to create “real life” opportunities in which youth can use their skills and receive consistent support, direction, and recognition for their achievements. These linkages provide youth with continuing opportunities to contribute to the community and connect with responsible adults long after their involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- **Significant attention must be focused on the development of sustained relationships that model, recognize and support the desired competencies and skills.** These relationships must be with adults and peers who can and will continue their support after the formal involvement of the juvenile justice system.
- **Strategies to promote youth competency must be culturally and gender informed and developmentally appropriate for the youth involved.** Given the diverse age and ability ranges of youth in the juvenile justice system, individualized strategies should be developed that are appropriate for the specific youth involved versus generic applications of strategies regardless of the developmental level and ability of the youth.

To effectively promote youth competency, juvenile justice resources must engage youth in meaningful activities that foster community integration and connection to positive social groups. Youth feel a sense of belonging and value when they have opportunities to participate in productive experiential activities that promote educational, social, vocational, civic and other life skills. Offering opportunities does not preclude setting limits or holding youth accountable for their actions. These concepts are not mutually exclusive, as all youth need limits and opportunities. It does call for changes in the predominant social service and provider models that deliver services “to” youth as passive recipients, rather than providing opportunities for youth to do “with” as active participants. It calls for us to talk with youth about what they “can do” rather than focusing on what they “cannot” do.

RELATIONSHIP TO TREATMENT ISSUES

The competency development approach recognizes the role of individual treatment or therapy as a vehicle to resolve mental health, learning or AODA barriers that interfere with youth acquiring competencies. While therapy places a priority on ameliorating symptoms, competency development emphasizes the acquisition of skills that allow youth to survive and thrive in their community.

Competency development focuses on identifying individual and family needs, strengths and resources while taking into account environmental and cultural factors. Families and other caring adults are viewed as essential resources in the process of competency development, as well as in efforts to ensure youth accountability and public safety.

The competency-based approach assumes that most youth who have committed delinquencies can begin immediate involvement in some valued activity with the right supervision and support. A competency development model places priority on recognizing and enhancing the individual capacities that improve a young person's ability to be productive and effective rather than on individual deficits. Interventions such as anger management, decision-making skill training, and cognitive restructuring are viewed as supplements to the experiential learning necessary to foster behavioral skill acquisition.

Unlike a response that presumes the remediation of a “problem” is sufficient, the competency development model requires that we identify needs and build on the strengths of the youth to actively contribute to their community. Through this process, youth not only learn to perform new skills, but also receive the recognition and reinforcement that leads to higher and higher levels of proficiency in performing valued skills.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Motivation, beliefs, and values are factors that impact everyone's actions. Having a skill or competency does not guarantee that a person will choose to use it. Choice and self-determination are factors that will impact outcomes. It is recognized that in addition to teaching skills, offering opportunity and providing support, youth must also have some level internal motivation to choose responsible and productive behavior. Although the concepts of values and motivation are not included within the core competencies, these variables are recognized as important and were considered in the development of the competency development inventories and protocols to be used.

The Competency Development model suggested here assumes three keys to success:

- *That youth actively participate in positive activities,*
- *That youth are supported in these activities by their parent, peers and caring adults, and*
- *That youth are recognized for their success in performing these skills*

APPLICATION OF A COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The principles and competencies identified here will provide the foundation to competency development efforts throughout the Juvenile Justice system.

It is recommended that:

- Competency development be a part of training for social workers, members of the juvenile court system, and service providers working with youth involved in the juvenile delinquency system.
- Competency development be an integrated part of the assessment and service planning process for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
- An assessment of youth competency and need inform case plans and recommendations to the court.
- Service providers offer programming options that develop competency and provide opportunities for youth to demonstrate competencies in an active and supported way. Current and new contracts with providers will include expectations to develop competencies using the principles of this charter and be a part of system integration efforts.
- Coordination occurs with others involved in the lives of youth (e.g. school personnel, community resources, parents, mentors, etc.) with the goal of creating an integrated and consistent system of response.
- The principles and competencies are catalysts in efforts to engage the community (public and private) in discussions about competency development for youth and in efforts to develop and direct greater resources (time, monetary, public support, etc.) toward the prevention and intervention of delinquency.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing an integrated system of competency development throughout the juvenile justice system will include:

- All parts of the juvenile justice system working in partnership.
- Having a common understanding, language and vision for competency development.
- Providing every youth who enters the juvenile justice system an opportunity to better understand and further develop their competencies and skill sets.
- Using system-wide protocols and uniform assessment and reporting formats to ensure consistency and coordination.
- Identifying representatives from each area of the juvenile justice system to oversee and ensure that competency development principles and protocols are integrated into the respective parts of the system.
- Reviewing the implementation plan on a regular basis to make adjustments and changes as needed.
- Tracking outcome.

Appendix A: Suggested benchmarks for the core competencies

Social Competencies--Life Skills

The ability to function independently

- Cares for personal needs such as medication, nutrition, hygiene and other day-to-day functions
- Locates and uses resources to accomplish goals *(I can you use the internet, phone book, bus schedule to find what I need)*
- Manages money in an appropriate manner *(I can you save money overtime for something I want.)*
- Manages time in an appropriate manner *(I can get to appointments, school, classes on time)*

The ability to problem-solve, make positive decisions and plan for the future

- Can state the problem
- Can identify solutions *(What can I do? Or, What could I have done instead?)*
- Articulates consequences of his or her actions *(What is likely to happen if?)*
- Seeks advice and assistance from adults/peers *(I go to adults for help and advice?)*
- Sets goals for the future *(I know what I want to do this school year, this summer, after high school)*
- Identifies steps toward achieving goals *(I know what I need to do to reach my goal)*

Ability to manage stress and emotions

- Identifies sources of stress *(I can name 3 things that stress me out)*
- Identifies ways to handle or minimize stress *(I can name 3 things that I do to relax)*
- Identifies people who provide support when stressed *(I can name 2 people to talk to when I'm stressed)*

Ability to participate in positive activities like hobbies, sports, or artistic activities

- Knows their interests, aptitudes and strengths *(I can name 3 things I am good at)*
- Identifies things to do or groups to join *(I can name 3 clubs, groups, or sports at school or in the community that I can do)*
- Takes steps necessary to engage in these activities
- Gets and stays involved in positive activities

Social Competencies--Work Skills/Employment

Ability to apply pre-employment skills

Knows personal interests and values applicable to employment

Participates in service or volunteer activities that provide "job-like" skills and experiences

(I volunteer somewhere, am in a service group like the boys scouts, or a church group, etc.)

Ability to seek employment successfully

Identifies options for employment

Knows how to fill out an application

Submits job applications and follows up as needed

Successfully participates in a job interview

(I interviewed for and got a job)

Identifies positive reference(s)

Finds a job

Obtains a work permit

(I know where to get a work permit)

Ability to maintain employment

Understands a work schedule and gets to work on time

Attends work every day as scheduled and dresses appropriately

Completes job tasks

Listens to and shows respect to supervisor/employer

Able to work with others

Able to complete work tasks independently

Able to solve problems with co-workers

Maintains a job until he or she chooses to leave

Leaves job with appropriate notice to employer

Ability to develop age-appropriate career plans

Explores career options

Relates educational activities to career goals

Relates volunteer activities to career goals

Social Competencies--Social/Interpersonal Skills

Ability to identify and avoid or effectively manage conflict

Recognizes conflict with others

Identifies personal responses—including emotions and perceptions

(I know what makes me mad and why)

Takes constructive action(s) to avoid or minimize potential conflict(s)

Shows or expresses empathy for others

Generates alternative solutions or actions

(What can I do?)

Learns from mistakes by looking at a situation after it occurs and considering other responses *(What else could I have done?)*

Develops and applies basic assertiveness skills

Ability to make and keep friends

Can identify 2 or more friends

Identifies mutual interests and positive activities with peers

Resolves conflicts with peers

Constructively uses free time with peers

Values and maintains positive relationships with diverse peers (culturally, background, interest areas, etc.)

Ability to take responsibility for actions/behavior

Recognizes and articulates own responsibility and behavior in situations

Self-reinforces positive behavior choices

Ability to maintain positive family relationships

Has and uses family members for support

Understands and follows family rules and expectations

Displays affection and concern for family members

Has chores or helps family out (age appropriate)

Competency Area: Commitment to Learning & Education

Ability to successfully perform basic academic skills within 15% or above the average of age cohort(s)

Values education *(I want to get good grades)*

Seeks and utilizes academic support and assistance *(I use a tutor or homework club)*

Tutors others

Completes homework

Ability to perform positive school-related behavior(s)

Gets to school on time

Attends school 95% of available school time

Behaves constructively in the classroom

Exhibits positive general school-related behavior outside the classroom

Ability to exhibit successful school attitude/motivation

Forms positive relationships with teachers/adults in school

Takes pride in work and accomplishments

Relates school performance to personal goals

Understands the relationship between education and future opportunity and/or career aspirations

Contributes to positive school environment

Competency Area: Constructive Use Of Time

Participation in creative activities

Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts

Young person is open to exploring and being exposed to new things

Participation in youth programs

Young person can identify areas/programs that they have an active interest in

Young person spends 3 or more hours per week in sports, clubs or organizations at school and/or in the community

Young person has an attachment to youth program or agency

Participation in religious community/spirituality

Young person spends one or more hours per week in spiritual activities or activities in a religious institution

Young person can identify and express the of value religion/spirituality

Spends time at home

Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week

Young person values time spent at home with parents or guardian

Young person engages in positive activities with his or her family

Competency Area: Support

Supportive family environment

- Identifies family love and support
- Parents provide structure and establish consistent expectations
- Youth experiences caring relationships with members of his or her extended family

Positive family communication

- Youth and his or her parent(s) communicate positively
- Youth seeks advice and counsel from parent(s)
- Family identifies and works through areas of conflict
- Parents recognize and affirm their child's strengths

Other supportive adult relationships

- Youth receives support from three or more non-parent adults *(I can name 3 adults that I can talk to and who care about me)*
- Other adults provide opportunity for youth to develop and display competencies to others in their community
- Accepts and replies to feedback from adults in a constructive manner

Caring Neighborhood

- Youth experiences caring neighbors
- Youth serves as a positive influence for others in his or her neighborhood

Caring School Climate

- School provides a caring, safe and encouraging environment
- Youth identifies and develops a positive relationship with school staff *(I can identify 1 or 2 school people I like and trust)*
- Youth actively engages in 1 or more school activities

Parent Involvement in Schooling

- Parents or caregivers are actively involved in the youth's education
- Parents make contact with the school and attend teacher conferences

Competency Area: Connection to Community (Empowerment)

Community values youth

- Youth perceives that adults in the community values him or her
- Adults volunteer time with youth
- Youth are involved in the planning and decision-making process within their community

Youth as resources

- Young people are given useful roles in the community
- Young people are involved in planning and implementation of school and community projects
- Young people's opinion is sought after and valued

Service to others and volunteering

- Young person volunteers in the community at least one hour per week
- Young person can identify the needs of others in their community or school

Sense and feeling of safety

- Young person feels safe at home, school, and community
- Young person has a safety plan that includes positive adults who they can go to for help and support
- Youth is educated on how to keep them safe (i.e. personal safety, sexual assault awareness, etc.)