



# Juvenile Group Reporting Project

**Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois  
Division of Juvenile Probation & Detention Services**

**SMAART Performance Management Report**

May 2013

**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**  
**DIVISION OF JUVENILE PROBATION & DETENTION SERVICES**  
**JUVENILE GROUP REPORTING PROJECT**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Circuit Court of Lake County is to serve the public. The Court accomplishes this mission by providing a fair and responsive system of justice, committed to excellence, and fostering public trust, understanding and confidence.

The Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services supports the mission of the Court by serving a juvenile system that ensures public protection from further acts of juvenile delinquency, and assisting in the accountability and rehabilitative needs of youthful offenders. In order to achieve this, the Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services provides a comprehensive assessment process and continuum of evidence-based interventions for youth and families referred to the division in order to reduce recidivism and increase compliance with court-ordered conditions.

**PROGRAM PURPOSE**

Over the past decade, there has been increased attention on community-based juvenile offender rehabilitation as a means to both curb correctional facility overcrowding and improve access to effective treatment options available to youth in their communities-of-origin. This emphasis, however, has created rising demands on local juvenile justice departments to adequately supervise and successfully treat an ever-growing number of, and often more serious types of, offenders within the community. The quality and efficacy of community-based correctional programs has been the subject of much research. In general, research findings have revealed programs that demonstrate the greatest success with offender populations tend to focus on social skills development, reduction of thinking errors, vocational training, misuse of leisure time, and substance abuse issues. This evidence, however, does not mean that all interventions which target an array of criminogenic needs are necessarily equally effective with all offender groups. Some studies have shown that lower risk offenders already come to supervision with a high probability of successful outcomes – without the addition of services or intense correctional programming. These offenders tend to have stable and positive social supports, fewer serious problems (e.g., substance abuse, mental illness, poor school experiences, homelessness, etc.), and demonstrate mostly pro-social behaviors. Placing these offenders in intensive correctional programs tends to disrupt their existing pro-social networks and increases their likelihood of recidivism. The principle of providing targeted interventions based on offender risk has been aptly demonstrated in the correctional literature. Highly structured, intensive, and long-term correctional programs are much more effective when the program focuses on higher risk offenders. These same programs, however, actually increase recidivism among lower-risk offenders. There are several explanations for this increased failure rate among lower-risk offenders in programs that otherwise demonstrate effective outcomes:

1. Placing low-risk offenders in more intense correctional interventions exposes them to higher-risk offenders. Relationships that develop among offenders in mixed-risk groups tend to erode the pro-social supports and attitudes that contributed to those offenders being classified as low-risk.

2. Lower-risk offenders tend to have good school experiences, positive relationships with their families, and are invested in pro-social activities. Placing them in highly structured, long-term or restrictive programs can disrupt those factors that make them low risk.
3. Younger, naive, or lower functioning, low-risk offenders may be manipulated by more sophisticated, higher-risk, predatory offenders.

Although much of correctional program research tends to focus on the impact of services and programming on the recidivism rates of higher-risk offenders, it is equally important to identify the amounts and types of treatment and correctional programming that might be beneficial, rather than harmful, to lower-risk offender. Several studies have found that less invasive, educational-based programs, which provide life-skills components in the areas of substance abuse, employment skills, educational opportunities, cognitive skills training, financial management, and anger control do, in fact, have a positive impact on recidivism among lower-risk offenders. The development of both treatment programs and supervision techniques that are based on the risk level of the offender can assist low-risk offenders in maintaining those pro-social supports that contribute to their “low-risk,” rating, while allowing corrections agencies to re-focus their energies and department resources on higher-risk offender populations.

The Circuit Court of Lake County, Illinois has developed a supervision protocol for delinquent cases that are classified as low risk to reoffend in the community. Correctional research studies affirm that cases classified as low-risk for recidivism should be supervised with the least amount of restriction and treated with less intensive programs and interventions compared with higher risk offenders. The Division of Juvenile Probation and Detention Services utilizes the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI), a validated assessment tool that measures risk, need and protective factors of adjudicated youth, to determine juvenile offenders’ risk for recidivism. Low-risk, low treatment need offenders are referred to Low-Risk Probation Supervision, a structured group reporting intervention. A single probation officer is designated to supervise the low-risk cases, along with the support of interns and volunteers, who meet with probationers at designated locations within their communities. Probationers provide documentation of their progress on probation which includes school attendance, police contacts, public service, general compliance in the home and any other specific orders related to the case. This supervision protocol was developed in consideration of evidence-based practices in juvenile corrections, which suggest that supervision and treatment strategies should be based on an offender’s actuarial risk rating and that the bulk of resources available to an agency be focused primarily on the moderate- to high-risk cases.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The Division of Juvenile Probation & Detention Services has established a specialized program to address the specific needs of minimum risk youth and their families while maintaining minimal contact standards established to ensure public safety. Evidence-Based Practices from the field of Juvenile Corrections suggest that less intensive services and supervision techniques directed towards minors that are classified as low-risk to recidivate results in more successful outcomes. Studies indicate that placing minimum risk offenders in overly restrictive programs with higher risk peers actually increases recidivism among low-risk offenders. The Juvenile Group Reporting Project was developed for low-risk juvenile offenders in Lake County as an alternative to traditional one-on-one reporting with a probation officer in order to best facilitate the supervision and program needs of this population, as well as direct the majority of division resources towards the supervision and

correctional treatment of higher risk offenders. The following criteria are utilized in determining which cases will be supervised on this caseload:

- The Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI) must be scored as a minimum.
- The Youth must have six months or longer prior to termination of supervision.
- Sex offenders are not eligible.
- No outstanding petitions or criminal charges.
- Must be residing in the community (i.e., not in residential placement)
- If the minor referred for transfer to the Group Reporting Project, no Administrative Sanctions have been applied within the last three months of supervision.

If a minor is placed on Juvenile Group Reporting at the time of sentencing, the family meets with the supervising Probation Officer after Court. At this initial meeting, the probation officer reviews the minor's court-ordered conditions of probation or supervision as well as the expectations of the Group Reporting Project. The family is assigned to a specific group reporting location based on their home address. The family is also provided with a packet that includes their next group reporting date and necessary mail in documentation forms. The youth and parents are informed of the expectations of the program and must be willing to commit to attending group reporting evenings and complete the required mailings. Without the commitment and accountability from the minor's family, the minor is less likely to succeed. The documentation forms and bi-monthly meetings were designed to comply with minimum youth contact standards. This includes one face to face contact every other month, with parent present and contact by telephone or mail on alternative months. Families also provide written verification of court-ordered treatment services providers and school personnel, who can provide collateral information to the probation officer, as well as completed public service hours and court-ordered financial obligation payments.

If a case is transferred to Juvenile Group Reporting Project from a higher risk classification or general supervision, the transferring Officer notifies the Group Reporting Officer that a case may be appropriate for group reporting. The current Probation Officer completes a re-assessment in the Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI). If the minor qualifies for the Group Reporting Project, the Probation Officers schedule a meeting to formally transfer the case. The Unit Manager is present for the meeting and if all are in agreement, the minor is transferred to the group. The family is contacted by telephone to explain the program and group expectations. A mailing is sent to the home which includes all of the necessary documentation. The family is given an opportunity to ask questions or voice any concerns regarding the meeting times.

Prior to the group reporting session, the supervising Probation Officer reviews all files for progress with the minor's court orders and completes a record check of the minor in order to note any new police contacts or violations prior to the meeting. Notes are made for the volunteers who are meeting with the families as to specific questions regarding the minors' compliance with their court orders. The Group Reporting Project volunteers are trained regarding a general understanding of how to read probation orders, group reporting forms and services ordered as a part of the probation plan. The volunteers must possess strong communication skills, a comfort level for communication with the minors and their families, be non-judgmental, reliable, possess strong relational and inter-personal skills, an ability to maintain confidentiality and dress appropriately. The number of volunteers and interns who are scheduled vary depending on the number of clients scheduled for that group. Three days prior to the group reporting session, the families are given reminder calls. On occasion, a family will have a conflict regarding the time or date of the meeting due to parents work or school schedules. At this time an individual meeting can be scheduled at the Probation Office to accommodate the make-up visit.

On the evenings of group reporting, the supervising Probation Officer, along with the intern(s) travel to the group reporting sites. There are currently three sites being utilized for Group Reporting meetings, which include the Juvenile Court complex and two Branch Court locations, increasing accessibility to the target population of minors who live within a particular area of the county. Group reporting times vary, as well, depending on the site. A volunteer is assigned to answering the door and directing the clients. This volunteer also provides the case notes to the remaining volunteers who are assigned to meeting with the clients and their parents. The Group Reporting Project is also able to accommodate families who are Spanish speaking by linking them with a Spanish speaking volunteer.

The supervising Probation Officer oversees the group process and is available to answer any questions that might arise. The volunteers are informed to direct any violations such as new police contacts, failing grades, lack of paperwork or non-compliance with court orders to the supervising Probation Officer during group reporting. The families are notified that Administrative Sanctions will be utilized for issues of non-compliance and that families will be contacted the next day in order to discuss the sanction. The volunteers review the case notes with the families and document the families' responses. The volunteers collect all verification documentation and note any missing correspondence. Each family is provided a new packet with the new dates for group reporting and the necessary mail in documentation form. The families also provide proof of residency by bringing current utility bills in for verification. The volunteers also meet individually with the families for a brief period of time. The volunteers' conversations are centered around the existing court orders and compliance; families obligated to provide the necessary documentation such as verification of address, school grades and attendance, letters of verification of service providers, completed public service hours and compliance with restitution and fee obligations.

After meeting with the families, the paperwork and documentation are turned into the supervising Probation Officer for review. Volunteers that are not currently meeting with families will make additional reminders calls to the families that have not arrived in order to ensure that they will not have to schedule a make-up visit due to a last minute problem to getting to the group. All information collected is documented by the supervising Probation Officer after the group reporting occurs. Any follow ups regarding sanctions, missed paperwork, lack of progress with court orders, missing school documentation or any other questions are addressed the next day by telephone with the minor's parents.

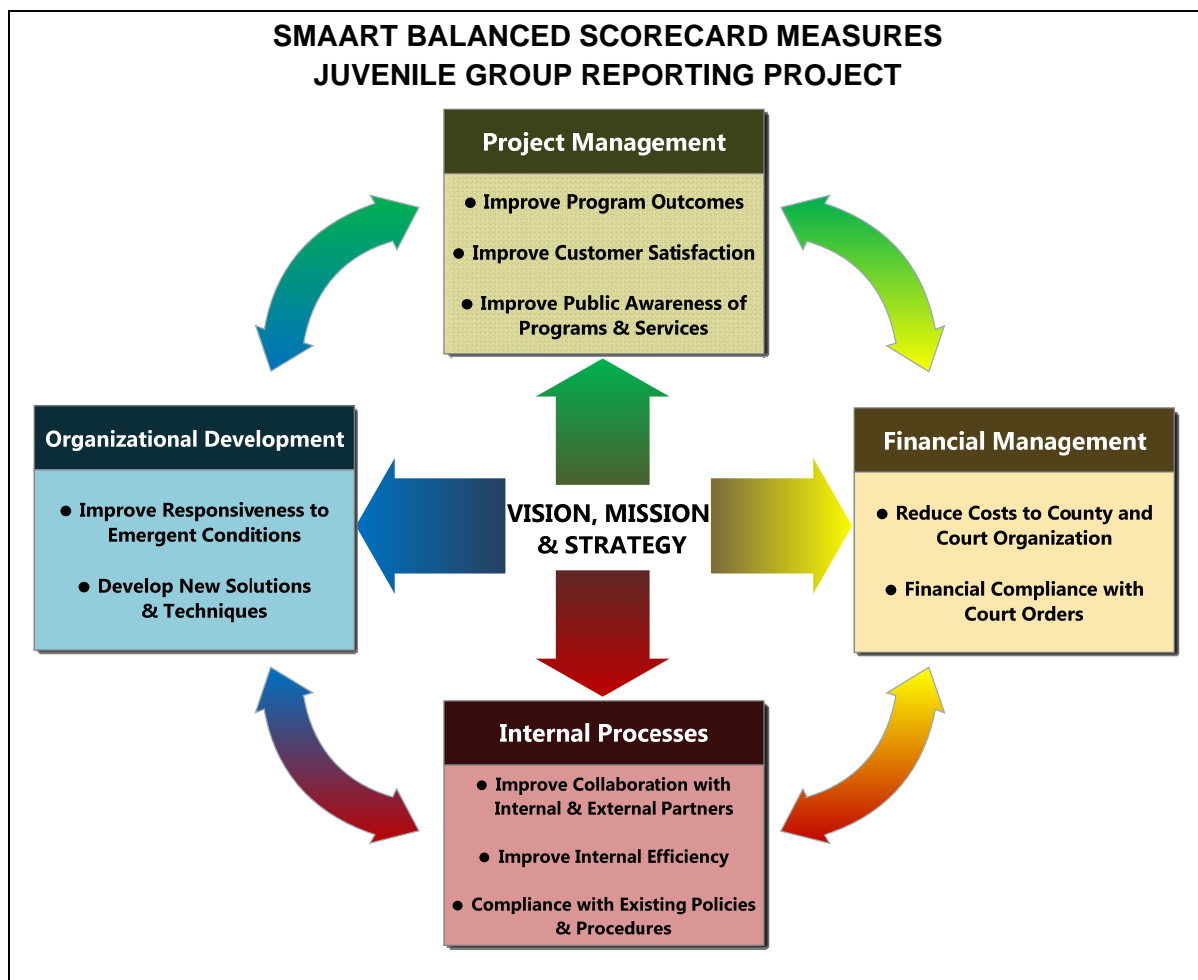
Several strategic sites within the community are designated for group reporting sessions. One probation officer, with volunteers/interns, is able to supervise a larger number of probationers, significantly reducing travel time and the costs associated with supervision in the community. Volunteers and interns receive quality training necessary to work with youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Research demonstrates that volunteers who are more engaged with cases remain longer in the volunteer program. Feedback from Interns suggests that active participation with correctional programs enhances the overall learning process from classroom to practical application. General division caseload management is also improved through this approach given one assigned probation officer is able to supervise a larger number of cases, thus reducing the caseload size of moderate to high risk case loads. More time and resources can then be directed to the higher risk cases based on need.

The goals developed around the Lake County Juvenile Group Reporting Project are consistent with the values and strategic objectives Circuit Court of Lake County and the Division of Juvenile Probation & Detention Services, as well as those outlined by the Lake County strategic plan:

- To maximize the existing resources of the Division of Juvenile Probation & Detention Services by facilitating large groups of low-risk probationers to report at one time, in one place, and with minimum staff time.
- To fully utilize resources within the community, including trained volunteers and community educational resources.
- To provide meaningful information and self-help skills to juvenile probationers.
- To reduce the population pressures on the main Juvenile Justice Complex building during peak hours of operation.

### **BALANCED SCORECARD OUTCOMES**

The Group Reporting Project was developed as a performance improvement project under the SMAART Performance Management Process of the Circuit Court of Lake County. The objective of the SMAART Performance Management Process is to improve the Court organization's capacity to monitor, manage, and enhance its services, programs and support activities. The Court organization has selected a number of outcome measures arranged in a Balanced Scorecard format which represent organizational effectiveness. The following scorecard measures were selected by the Group Reporting Project Team during the development and implementation of the program:



The Group Reporting Project presents itself as an extremely efficient method of managing low-risk juvenile offenders placed on probation supervision, especially in terms of court and client cost-savings. The strategic positioning of sites throughout the county, the short (30 – 60 minutes) bi-monthly meeting requirements, the availability of make-up sessions, and “no-cost-to-client” programming associated with the Group Reporting Project provides both cost- and time-savings benefits to probationers and their families, as well as increases the opportunities and likelihood for compliance with the court-ordered conditions of probation supervision. In addition, the Group Reporting Project yields an estimated annual net savings of \$283,777 (FY 2013 budget figure) in operating costs. This figure is based on comparisons of supervising the current Group Reporting caseload of 162 probationers through traditional, individual meeting requirements at the probation office. The probationers seen by the group reporting officer would require five additional probation officers based on an average caseload size of about 30 probationers. Those officers would cost \$372,425 (per the FY13 budget guidelines), which represents the costs avoided through the use of this program. The estimated cost of the one officer who runs the program is \$88,648, resulting in a net savings of \$283,777.

<b>Lake County Division of Juvenile Probation &amp; Detention Services Juvenile Group Reporting Project - Cost Analysis 2011 through 2012</b>					
Number of Probationers	Group Reporting Project		Tradition Supervision		Estimated Net Cost Savings
	Number of Probation Officers	Program/Staff Cost	Number of Probation Officers	Program/Staff Cost	
162	1	\$88,648	5	\$372,425	\$283,777

In order to further prove the performance value of the Group Reporting Project, it is necessary to demonstrate that it is also an effective program. In this regard, it was hypothesized that probationers assigned to the group reporting condition would be just as likely to succeed on probation supervision as those assigned to traditional one-on-one supervision. This modest expectation regarding the success of the program recognizes that low-risk probationers, based on actuarial risk, are generally less likely to reoffend and more likely to successfully complete the terms and conditions associated with community supervision. Though participants in the Group Reporting conditions demonstrated increased successful completion of probation, these differences were not considered statistically significant. In meeting this condition, however, the Group Reporting Project demonstrates that it does no harm to juveniles by putting them at greater risk of failure, and consequently increased recidivism.

<b>Lake County Division of Juvenile Probation &amp; Detention Services Low-Risk Probationers Completion of Probation Supervision</b>		
	Successful Completion of Probation Supervision	Unsuccessful Completion of Probation Supervision
Non – Group Reporting (January – June 2010)	85.7%	14.3%
Group Reporting Project (July – December 2010)	87.1%	12.9%
Group Reporting Project (January – December 2011)	90.4%	9.6%

A single probation officer working with volunteers/interns is able to supervise higher numbers of probationers successfully reducing travel time and the costs associated with supervision. The Group Reporting Project also

allows other probation officers in the division to focus more time and resources on higher risk youth. Since the program utilizes volunteers and interns and alternative sites, it enhances community collaboration. The program requires the probationer's family to provide the necessary documentation for school, service providers, public service and any other agency involvement, thus holding the parents and youth accountable for the minor's progress with the court ordered conditions. The monthly forms include a section for the parents to document the amount of payments toward restitution and fees. Subsequently, it has improved the overall compliance with the payment of the court ordered financial obligations. Stakeholders are essential for this program to run effectively. Partnerships have been established with the College of Lake County which facilitates the Circuit's volunteer program. In addition, partnerships have been established with local colleges and universities that refer interns to the division for required credit hours. Both volunteers and interns play an active role in this program. Additionally, Branch court locations throughout the county are utilized as meeting sites for this program. The Lake County judiciary, particularly the Juvenile Court Judges, view this program favorable and support its continuation based on outcome measures obtained thus far.

The table below compares the satisfaction of Juvenile Group Reporting participants with those of juvenile probationers assigned to standard probation. Generally, youth participating in the Group Reporting Project responded more favorably to program staff than youth assigned to standard probation did to their assigned probation officer.

<b>JUVENILE GROUP REPORTING PROJECT v. STANDARD PROBATION PERCENT AGREEMENT: CLIENT SERVICES SURVEY RESULTS - 2011</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Group Reporting</b>	<b>Standard Probation</b>
1. Overall, I was satisfied with the services I received as a client.	90.8%	54.1%
2. When I first reported, a staff person clearly explained the rules and what was expected of me.	93.8%	83.8%
3. When I first reported, a staff person clearly answered all of my questions.	98.5%	80.6%
4. I believe that I have a good relationship with this staff person.	82.5%	65.7%
5. I believe that this staff person treats me fairly.	95.2%	83.3%
6. I believe that this staff person treats me with respect.	98.4%	77.8%
7. I believe that this staff person wants to help me with my problems.	93.8%	82.9%
8. I believe that this staff person wants to help me succeed on supervision	96.9%	80.0%
9. When I have a question, I believe that this staff person will answer it clearly.	96.9%	82.9%
10. When I have a question, I believe that this staff person will answer it honestly.	95.3%	77.8%

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In an era of expanding correctional populations and limited resources to manage these offenders through traditional means, correctional agencies must be pro-active in developing programming – treatment approaches and supervision techniques – that are equally responsive to the rehabilitative needs of offenders and to the safety of communities. Probation agencies, in particular, have not only seen dramatic increases in their caseloads over the past decade, but are often charged with supervising higher-risk offenders within the community. These offenders often require greater supervision and treatment in order to reduce recidivism and successfully complete probation than lower-risk offenders. If limited agency resources are to be directed where they can be most effective in supporting offender change, then agencies must learn to utilize assessments that appropriately distinguish higher- from lower-risk offenders and develop programming that is responsive to the needs of



offenders based on that risk. The Lake County Juvenile Group Reporting Project has demonstrated to be both an effective and efficient means of supervising low-risk juvenile offenders in the community, so that the resources of the Division of Juvenile Probation & Detention Services can be successfully managed to address the needs of higher-risk offenders.

The efficiency and efficacy demonstrated by the Lake County Group Reporting Project is consistent with the values, goals and objectives of the Circuit Court of Lake County as an organization, and the Division of Juvenile Probation & Detention Services as a direct provider responsible for the supervision and treatment of offenders residing in the community. Additionally, the Group Reporting Project positively impacts each of the standards outlined in the Circuit Court's current strategic plan (2009): *access to justice* (e.g., responsiveness to the needs of clients; and affordable client-costs in terms of time, money, and reasonable/fair procedures); *expedition and timeliness* (e.g., the processing of cases throughout the entire court system in a timely, efficient and effective manner); *equality, fairness and integrity* (e.g., an individualized approach to assuring compliance with the orders of the court); and *independence and accountability* (e.g., accountability for public resources, and the responsibility to change in response to evidence-based and best practices research). In terms of fulfilling these values, the Group Reporting Project is a model program for the Judicial Circuit of Lake County, and an example for programs throughout the Juvenile Justice System.