

By Stacy Floden for SurfKY.com

FRANKFORT, KY (2/23/12) – The Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice recently completed an 18-month study of its training academy, thought to be the country’s first comprehensive job task analysis and needs assessment of a juvenile justice training program.

“We are committed to providing our youth workers with the training they need to be successful on the job,” said DJJ Acting Commissioner Hasan Davis. “Basic training at the DJJ Academy is the most uniform experience of entry-level workers and constitutes the training necessary for a facility youth worker to adequately perform their job. I want to make sure they are being properly trained to effectively address youths’ needs.”

The needs assessment analyzed current training at the academy to establish the value of prior instruction; verify subject areas where new programming is needed; and develop consensus on the most important subject areas. The job task analysis, a rigorous, systematic inquiry, identified and described the essential core tasks to help guide curriculum updates and revisions.

The department partnered with Commonwealth Research Consulting (CwRC) to conduct the reviews

“One indication of good academy preparation is that knowledge and skill content taught at the academy fits with what supervisors expect youth workers to demonstrate on the job,” said CwRC President Dr. James B. Wells. “Our role in this study was to provide scientifically based results that allow DJJ to validate existing training content and methods as well as to discover any training areas that need to be developed and provided to entry level youth workers.”

The training needs assessment collected data from a variety of sources throughout all levels of the DJJ organization and reviewed the latest “evidence-based best practices” relevant to training needs and tasks in juvenile corrections. The training needs assessment culminated in a survey that solicited ratings on 87 training topics from DJJ employees responsible for training new facility youth workers and/or supervising their performance on the job either directly or indirectly.

The job task analysis identified 334 job tasks performed by facility youth workers. Youth workers throughout the agency were then asked how frequently they perform each task, while supervisors were asked to rate the criticality of each task and where it should be learned. Ultimately the job task analysis identified 139 essential youth worker job tasks that require academy training.

Kentucky DJJ achieved notoriety in the late 1990s when it was recognized as a national leader in the development of a model juvenile justice system. While working diligently to implement the provisions of a federal consent decree designed to improve the conditions of juvenile confinement in Kentucky’s state-operated residential treatment facilities, DJJ created a pre-service training academy for its direct-care juvenile justice staff, one of the first of its kind in the country.

“Implementation of the results of this empirically based training needs assessment and job tasks analysis will again make Kentucky DJJ a national leader in juvenile justice reform since no other juvenile justice system in the country we are aware of, has ever put this much effort into determining the content of its academy training curriculum,” said Dr. Wells. “I suspect that as a result of this study, Kentucky DJJ’s approach to developing and implementing training will be considered a national model that other juvenile justice systems will want to examine and possibly emulate.”

“I commend Dr. Wells and his staff on the comprehensive study that has been conducted. The results will be used to guide policy decisions concerning the content and conduct of basic training,” said Davis. “In an effort to design and deliver state of the art training for our newest facility employees, we will take the findings and determine what should be taught.”

The 18-month study was made possible by a 2008 Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG). JABG is administered by the State Relations and Assistance Division of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of

Justice. Through the JABG program, funds are provided as block grants to states for programs promoting greater accountability in the juvenile justice system. This projects cost included \$155,698.97 federal and \$17,299.88 general funds.

Information provided by Stacy Floden