

# Research at Youth Villages

More than 15 years of detailed outcome evaluation have put Youth Villages on the forefront of applied research in the treatment of children with emotional and behavioral problems and their families.

## Outcome evaluation process

Youth Villages established its Research Department in 1994. Led by Sarah Hurley, Ph.D., the department includes Ph.D., master's- and bachelor's-level staff who collect and analyze data gleaned from youth in all the programs Youth Villages offers. Tracking youth who receive at least 60 days of service at six, 12 and 24 months post-discharge, Youth Villages followed more than 12,000 children and families in 2009. This diligent follow-up process has allowed Youth Villages to amass one of the most comprehensive outcome datasets in the country on the treatment of children with emotional and behavioral problems and their families. This ongoing outcome evaluation process has yielded crucial information that has translated into direct program improvements and improved outcomes for children.

## Review of outcome evaluation process

Through a grant from The Hyde Foundation, Youth Villages consulted with Dr. Rick Barth of the Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill to further review its outcome evaluation process and improve its effectiveness. This project produced important information that will be used in the development of an algorithm to help Youth Villages better understand the linkages between youth and family characteristics, program activities and long-term outcomes.

## Research partnerships

Over the years, Youth Villages has partnered with 15 colleges and universities to better analyze our data and examine questions related to child welfare and children's mental health. Youth Villages' collaboration with Dr. Barth and his team resulted in the publication of three journal articles.

## Published studies

Barth, R., Greeson, J., Guo, S., Green, R., Hurley, S., & Sisson, J. (2007). **Outcomes for youth receiving intensive in-home therapy or residential care: A comparison using propensity scores.** *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 77 (4), 497-505.

Greeson, J., Guo, S., Barth, R., Hurley, S. & Sisson, J. **Outcomes of intensive in-home therapy for youth: Contributions of therapist stability, and youth age, race, and risk factors.** *Research on Social Work Practice*.

Barth, R., Greeson, J., Guo, S., Green, R., Hurley, S., & Sisson, J. (2007). **Changes in family functioning and child behavior following intensive in-home therapy.** *Children and Youth Services in Review*, 29 (8), 988-1009.

## Recognition

**Harvard Business School** has recognized Youth Villages for its successful program expansion and replication. Youth Villages now serves as a case study for HBS students.

In 2009, **the White House** recognized Youth Villages as a results-oriented nonprofit organization promising in bringing about social change.

# Current and future research

In addition to our ongoing outcome evaluation process, Youth Villages is involved in several current studies and is planning additional ones, including the first set of clinical trials of our Intercept and Transitional Living programs.

## Current studies:

- *Translating fiscal year improvements into better outcomes for children and families:* Youth Villages has worked closely with Fred Wulczyn and his team at Chapin Hall in implementing performance-based contracting in Tennessee. Designed to move youth to permanency more quickly, our current study examines how fiscal year performance improvements translate to better long-term outcomes for children and families.

- *Follow-up data selection bias: respondents vs. non-respondents:* Youth Villages, in consultation with Dr. Rick Barth of the University of Maryland and Dr. Teresa Waters, a health economist, is conducting a study to detect and correct for potential selection bias in the organization's outcome evaluation process; the study may result in more accurate estimates of long-term outcomes for the entire population of youth served in Youth Villages' programs.

- *Birth-to-4 pilot study:* Youth Villages is developing a program model, based on our Intercept model, to prevent recurrence of abuse or neglect in the most vulnerable population – youth age birth to four who have already been abused or neglected. The model will incorporate developmentally appropriate and evidence-based therapies for young children and their families to increase protective factors and decrease risk factors for abuse. Preeminent scholars from across the country are consulting on the pilot, including Dr. Diane DePanfilis, a professor and associate dean for research at the University of Maryland School of Social Work and director of the Ruth H. Young Center for Families and Children.

## Future studies and trials:

- *Transitional Living program clinical trial:* In cooperation with MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people, Youth Villages is planning to begin the first clinical trials of its Transitional Living program in 2010.

- *Intercept program clinical trial:* Youth Villages is in the initial planning phase of a clinical trial of its Intercept program; MDRC will conduct an independent evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the program.