



The EBP-PLUS Model: Liberating Youth, Families, and Community from the Justice System

Policy Brief #1

March 2018

THE EBP+ COLLABORATIVE

Twelve base-building organizations along with Impact Justice and the W. Haywood Burns Institute have been working together as the EBP+ Collaborative. These organizations are:

- + Alternative Rehabilitation Communities, Harrisburg, PA
- + Barrios Unidos, Santa Cruz, CA
- + Community Connections for Youth, South Bronx, New York
- + Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ), Oakland, CA
- + Fathers and Families of San Joaquín, Stockton, CA
- + Impact Justice, Oakland, CA
- + La Plazita, Albuquerque, NM
- + Latino Network, Portland, OR
- + POIC, Portland, OR
- + Running Rebels, Milwaukee, WI
- + RYSE Center, Richmond, CA
- + W. Haywood Burns Institute, Oakland, CA
- + Youth Empowerment Project, New Orleans, LA
- + Youth Advocate Programs, Harrisburg, PA

INTRODUCTION

Many community-based organizations across the country have been marginalized and frustrated by efforts to adopt evidence-based practices within the youth justice system. This is particularly true of organizations that are led by and serve communities of color—the communities most impacted by mass incarceration.

Leaders and families of color observe the failures of the programs promoted by the courts. The evidence-based practice classes feel judgmental and institutional and fail to recognize the strengths of the youth and families who attend.

Research points to another challenge: Research on the most well-known evidence-based programs included youth of color, but failed to compare the findings for youth of color to white youth. In this way, they have failed to prove effectiveness. Nonetheless, these are the programs that receive the most funding from state and local governments.

For these reasons, the members of the EBP+ Collaborative have resisted the adoption of evidence-based practices. At the same time, their more effective approach to social change and youth development have been dismissed or intentionally thwarted by system stakeholders.

Coming together as a collaboration to develop our own evidence-based practice has not been easy. Many partners have been skeptical of researchers and the process of proving that what they do “works.” Others have not wanted to create an evidence-based practice because they didn’t want to be associated with existing EBP’s.

However, we have developed a theory and a model that we are testing using multiple research methodologies. This model has intentionally been developed for youth of color with serious and violent charges so that this approach can be used as a credible model around providing alternatives to incarceration for populations most often excluded from community supports.

When we have findings, we will be in a position to begin educating and holding accountable legislators and other decision makers to shift funding away from programs that are not effective with youth of color back to our communities so that we can heal and build more strength.

THE MISSION OF THE EBP+ COLLABORATION

We are a collaboration of organizations that are led by leaders of color and serving youth of color. We are developing a program model that can be used as an alternative for incarceration—even when youth have been charged for serious and violent crimes.

We are shaping systems and deconstructing systemic racism. We need to take responsibility for informing the system and challenging the system with proven models that can be utilized and set best practices for alternatives.

WHAT DO WE DO?

While we have some differences, there are some important similarities in the way that we have developed and implemented our youth programs. In particular, we are leaders of color who come from the same communities as the youth we serve. This central tenet is critical. In all, we commonly:

- + Choose organizational leaders and hire staff from the same communities that we serve. This means most leaders and staff are of color and/or previously incarcerated.
- + Value the lived experiences of our leaders and staff as much as their formal educations.
- + Run our organizations using intentional social justice and healing frameworks.
- + Develop programs rooted in cultural beliefs and practices.
- + We provide a range of holistic services.
- + We maintain relationships with youth and their families beyond formal program participation.
- + Run our organizations centering youth vision and leadership.
- + Work to own our own land and buildings to establish economic independence and sustainability.

The way we hire and deliver services is the “plus” that is added to the words “evidence-based practice” in our model title. Unless these practices are followed, organizations are not following our model.

HOW DOES THE EBP+ COLLABORATIVE IMPROVE YOUTH LIVES?

In order to identify the youth outcomes that the collaboration most intentionally and effectively targets, we worked together to develop a theory of change using a language grounded in our work to decarcerate youth. A chart depicting this theory can be found on page 5. A glossary explaining our terms can be found in Appendix B.

From this chart, you can see that the theory is nested. We aim to improve youth lives, but this work sits within our work to improve families' lives and our communities.

Focusing, for the purpose of this policy brief, on youth outcomes, we identified five categories of youth outcomes that we aim to improve:

- + Elevate youth leadership and expertise
- + Facilitate youth resourcefulness
- + Support youth healing
- + Encourage youth connectedness
- + Mobilize youths' forward movement

We intentionally chose outcomes that reinforce youth strength and avoided outcomes such as “recidivism” that are both negative and reductionist. We explain each category of youth outcomes in more detail below.

Elevate youth leadership and expertise

All of the members of the collaboration believe that youth are the most knowledgeable experts on their lives and, therefore, their voices and leadership should be lifted as we work towards liberating our communities from the justice system. We do this by:

- + Developing youth narratives that will lead to system reform.
- + Promoting young people as experts and following their vision, direction, capacity and needs
- + Encouraging youth to mentor other youth and hiring them into meaningful positions
- + Helping youth develop solutions (policy, research and movement building) that address problems that impact their peers and their communities

The EBP+ Model

What we do for our communities

What we do for families

What we do for youth

- + Elevate youth leadership and expertise
- + Facilitate youth resourcefulness
- + Support youth healing
- + Encourage youth connectedness
- + Mobilize youths' forward movement

- + Elevating youth voice with families, communities and systems (i.e. youth speaking at events in DC, rallies, etc.)
- + Facilitating collective action and community organizing efforts led by youth

Facilitate youth resourcefulness

Just as we facilitate youth leadership, we want to encourage self-sufficiency and resourcefulness. We do this by:

- + Modeling self-efficacy to counter learned helplessness
- + Expanding awareness of resources available to help raise self and community
- + Encouraging economic independence that challenges behaviors that risk system-involvement
- + Mentoring youth to be their own advocates in court, with probation officers, and in schools
- + Translating “street skills” as transferable skills (i.e. willingness to take risks, outside of the box thinking, situational awareness, networking)
- + Making vocational skills accessible without system involvement (school expulsions, probation, etc.). Currently, vocational skills are often only promoted when there is a perceived “inability to learn.”

Support youth healing

Over the past five years, the field of youth justice has begun to focus on trauma-informed services and programs. However, much of the research fails to take structural racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia into account as a source of trauma. Furthermore, this lens can also be pathologizing for youth because it anchors a discussion in past negative experiences. Instead, we all support youth healing so that they may become active leaders in their community. We do this by:

- + Encouraging youth to take ownership and responsibility in shaping future
- + Helping youth heal from oppressive trauma (racism, sexism, homophobia, system involvement, etc.)
- + Developing youths’ critical consciousness so that they connect to history. “Know history, know self”; “no history; no self”
- + Helping youth articulate their interconnection and self-defined purpose
- + Improving youth self-care

- + Utilizing culturally relevant healing practices
- + Centering work around decolonization
- + Intergenerational community-building and healing (i.e. sitting in circle with youth)
- + Increasing love for self, family, culture and community. Love is why our work, works.

Encourage youth connectedness

Research on girls in the justice system has long focused on the importance of relationships. However, youth of all genders benefit from positive relationships with their friends, families, and community members. We support youth connectedness in many ways including:

- + Developing youth pride in their identity and leadership role in their communities
- + Encouraging positive relationships with caring adults, peers, and family
- + Managing conflict, both internal and external and mitigating negative judgements of youth
- + Employing cultural and spiritual identity to maintain strength
- + Overcoming real and perceived feelings of apathy by others while affirming youths' interpersonal experiences

Mobilize youths' forward movement

Evaluations of programs for youth in the justice system traditionally focus on whether there has been a reduction in recidivism. This preoccupation with future crimes anchors youth stories into the past. Instead, we want to focus on how we help youth and their families move into the future. We do this through:

- + Shorter lengths of involvement in juvenile justice system (during each time young person becomes involved)
- + Successful completion of probation
- + Helping youth obtain diploma or GED
- + Reconnecting youth to their families
- + Helping youth to define and achieve their own success
- + Providing opportunities for youth to make money

RESEARCHING THE MODEL

The EBP+ Collaborative has worked to develop a research methodology that they believe will accurately capture the work we all do. Impact Justice and the W. Haywood Burns Institute are responsible for collecting and analyzing all of the data. The collaboration members will collectively write all briefs and reports.

The research will be conducted using three intertwined efforts. First, all of the members are collecting surveys from youth before and after participating in programming. This survey uses everyday language to capture all of the outcomes that we are measuring (see Appendix A).

Additionally, Impact Justice and the W. Haywood Burns Institute are conducting site visits in five counties in order to document the complexities of programming and relationship building between staff and families and between the organization and the justice system.

Finally, Impact Justice and Burns are collecting probation system data in five counties in order to gauge whether there is a change in recidivism. The purpose of this last piece of research is to be able to answer stakeholder questions about whether recidivism is reduced in each of the sites. However, the broader design of the study is intended to tell the broader story of youth experience and staff expertise.

As collaboration reports are written and disseminated across the youth justice field, members hope to reshape the discourse around justice-involved youth of color and the changes that they will be making in their communities.

APPENDIX A: YOUTH SURVEY

The survey that is used by all participating partners at the beginning and end of programming is attached below.

Initials:

DOB:

Today's Date:

Survey #:

Circle the number that matches how you feel:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply
I think about my future when I make decisions.	1	2	3	4	0
I know ways I can help my community.	1	2	3	4	0
I am interested in legal and safe ways to make money.	1	2	3	4	0
I know about the history of my people.	1	2	3	4	0
I believe I can be a leader.	1	2	3	4	0
I believe I can make positive change in my community.	1	2	3	4	0
I am working on healing from past traumatic experiences.	1	2	3	4	0
I have opportunities to make positive changes in my community.	1	2	3	4	0
I have positive adults in my life.	1	2	3	4	0
I have positive friends my age.	1	2	3	4	0
I know how to work through problems without violence.	1	2	3	4	0
I have ideas about how to make probation better.	1	2	3	4	0
I mentor and provide guidance to other young people.	1	2	3	4	0
I have been to a rally, march or community meeting.	1	2	3	4	0
I make fewer decisions that are harmful to me or others.	1	2	3	4	0
I have what I need to succeed.	1	2	3	4	0
I ask adults for what I need.	1	2	3	4	0
I am successfully completing probation.	1	2	3	4	0
I want to graduate from school.	1	2	3	4	0
I know where to find support to help graduate.	1	2	3	4	0

Circle ALL that apply:

What is your race or ethnicity?	Latino(a)/Chicano(a) African/Black African American/Black Hispanic
	Indigenous/Native American First Nation
	White East Asian South Asian Pacific Islander
	An identity not listed _____
What sex were you assigned at birth?	Female Male Intersex
What is your gender identity/how do you identify?	Female Male A gender
	Transgender Genderqueer
	An identity not listed _____
Who are you romantically involved with?	Males Females Both Neither
	An identity not listed _____

Circle ALL that apply:

Are you currently employed?	Yes, full time Yes, part time
	No, looking for a job No, and not looking for a job
Are you currently in school?	Yes No
Have you ever been suspended or expelled from school?	Suspended Expelled No
Do you plan on continuing your education?	Yes No Not Sure

Please Write 3 Words That Describe You!

1. _____ Reason _____

2. _____ Reason _____

3. _____ Reason _____

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

collective action and community organizing: Collective action and community organizing are activities taken by a group of people working to make society more just. Community organizers work to reform schools, the courts, local, state, and national government using strategies that educate and motivate neighbors to get involved with social change efforts. Activities might include town hall meetings, painting murals, and protests.

critical consciousness: Paulo Freire says that educating for critical consciousness is a tool that teaches students about their social and political histories and then how to question those histories.

cultural beliefs and practices: Cultural beliefs and practices are the many ideas and rites around birth, education, religion, human development, and death that are passed from one person to the next within a community. Within the EBP+ Collaborative, the cultural beliefs and practices that are shared are grounded in the indigenous and ancestral communities that the youth come from. The purpose of sharing these beliefs and practices with young people is to build a sense of personal and community pride.

decolonization: All of the communities of color that are overrepresented in the justice system have been impacted by colonization. European colonists came to Africa and began trading slaves and transporting them around the world. European colonists also claimed North, Central, and South American land as their own, establishing new economic and political systems over existing indigenous practices. The organizations in this collaborative intentionally work with youth to teach them this history, to learn native political, economic, social, and spiritual practices, and provides a way to lead and develop new solutions based on the strength of their ancestor's communities.

evidence-based practice: Within the field of criminal justice, researchers have identified particular practices that reduce recidivism. The research methods that are used for this research are quantitative, using statistical modeling to predict how far recidivism will drop. Examples of evidence-based practices include the use of risk and needs assessments and cognitive behavioral therapy curricula. Notably, the EBP+ Collaborative is conducting a research project that uses equally rigorous quasi-experimental methods to measure how members'

approach improves a far wider range of outcomes for youth using an approach that is grounded in the histories and practices of communities of color.

healing framework: The field of criminal justice has begun to recognize the work of Nadine Burke-Harris and other health professionals that focus on the negative effects of trauma. This work is based on research that focuses on adverse childhood experiences such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with a parent who has a substance abuse disorder. Recognizing that many youth in the justice system have had adverse childhood experiences, probation, court, and mental health providers have started to provide trauma-informed services to the young people that they serve. Building on this foundation, members of the EBP+ Collaborative wish to take the emphasis away from past trauma and onto healing using a more culturally-based and holistic healing framework that incorporates traditions that emerge from communities of color.

social justice: Social justice is a term that applies to people working for fair and just distribution of social and economic resources. This work requires organizing to break down social barriers that are grounded in racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia.