

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, OHIO
LEARNING INDEPENDENCE and FAMILY EMPOWERMENT (LIFE) PROGRAM
IMPROVING THE LIVES OF YOUTH INVOLVED IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE
SYSTEM

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According to the American Correctional Association, approximately 93,000 young people are held in juvenile justice facilities across the United States. Many studies have shown the negative impact of incarceration on youth and states have reported a 50 percent or higher recidivism rate. Research has shown that one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism and promote public safety, while improving the lives of youth and families, is community based programming.

Montgomery County, Ohio is one community that has taken an innovative, inter-systemic, collaborative approach to providing community based services to adolescents and their families to reduce recidivism of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. The Learning Independence and Family Empowerment (LIFE) Program, part of the statewide Behavioral Health/ Juvenile Justice initiative, is a partnership between the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board for Montgomery County, South Community Behavioral Healthcare, Montgomery County Juvenile Court (including Reclaiming Futures) and Samaritan Crisis Care. Included in the partnership is also Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, who provides research and evaluation for the program. The LIFE Program, which has been in operation since 2006, provides home based mental health services in conjunction with juvenile justice programming to youth and families in Montgomery County.

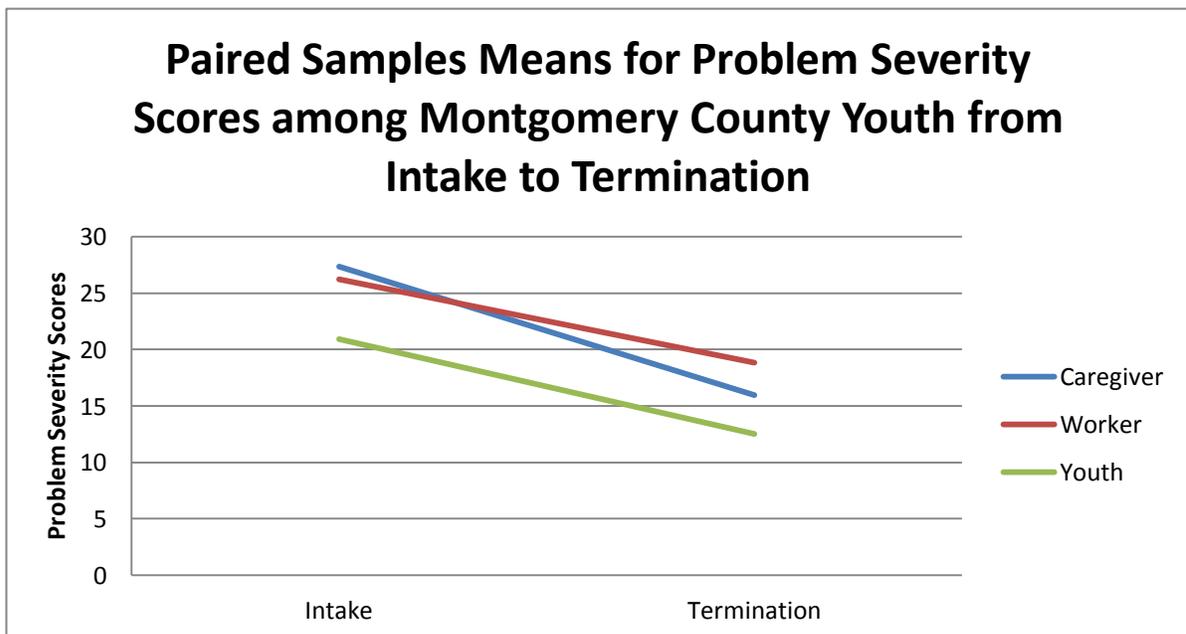
The primary referral sources for the LIFE Program are Montgomery County Juvenile Court and Ohio Department of Youth Services. Youth in the LIFE Program are between the ages of 12 and 17. After a mental health assessment is provided by Crisis Care, a county-wide crisis and assessment service, each family is linked with a community-based family therapist. The therapist meets with the family in their home to facilitate treatment utilizing the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) model. South Community Behavioral Healthcare is an FFT Certified Site. All the therapists, probation officers and their supervisors have been trained in the FFT model and attend regular FFT trainings together.

Youth also have access to a psychiatrist who works closely with the team, and they may be linked with case management or individual therapy if needed. Additionally, youth involved in the LIFE Program receive intensive probation services and have access to a mentor (called a Natural Helper) through Reclaiming Futures and to other programming through the Probation Department.

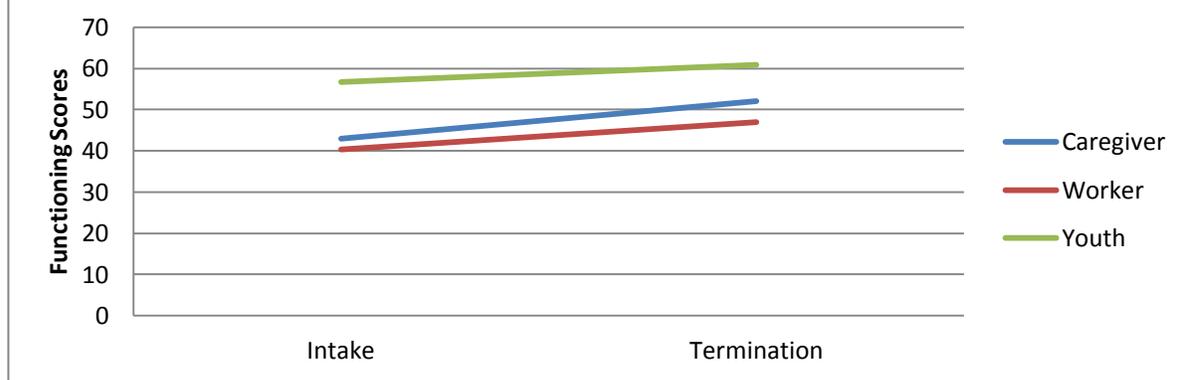
The LIFE Program's success is attributable to the strong collaborative efforts across disciplines and between partner agencies. All agencies have made the commitment to collaborate with one another and to provide comprehensive, effective services using a positive approach in order to help youth and their families at every stage of need. In addition to the collaboration between providers, there is an Advisory Committee for the LIFE Program. It is comprised of representatives of each of the LIFE Program partner agencies. This group meets quarterly to review progress and share ideas, as well as to coordinate activities as needed.

The data reflect that outcomes for the LIFE Program are positive at all levels. Commitments of youth to Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS) custody by Montgomery County continue to drop significantly thanks to a combination of early and effective intervention and local alternatives to ODYS.

Youth who receive services from the LIFE Program are also doing better and reducing their involvement in the Juvenile Justice system. **Of the 634 youth the LIFE Program has now served, only (0.9%) were sent to an Ohio Department of Youth Services facility at any time following their enrollment.** Two thirds of the youth who completed the program reported less frequent contacts with police; reported use of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine was cut by more than 50%; trauma symptoms including anxiety, depression, anger, were all significantly decreased; and functioning in the home as reported by both the youth and parents was significantly improved. Outcomes have also shown that recidivism of youth who successfully completed the LIFE Program has been reduced by 69.3%.



Paired Samples Means for Functioning Scores among Montgomery County Youth from Intake to Termination



Most significantly, families are experiencing positive results. One family chose to share their story. A female youth was placed on probation after she was charged with several violent offenses towards her family members. She had very few friends and frequently would bully peers at school. The youth was placed on home instruction due to her behaviors in class. She had a history of leaving the house for several days at a time without permission and frequently abused Marijuana, Cocaine, and Xanax. Her parents were constantly in fear of her assaultive behavior and felt like hostages in their home. Even though the youth was referred to therapy, she rarely participated. As a result of the youth's "out-of-control" behavior, the court placed her at a residential treatment center to address her mental health and substance abuse issues. While in treatment, she continued to be resistant. The Juvenile Probation Officer requested that she be removed from placement due to consistent non-compliance. She was given one last chance and was referred to the L.I.F.E. program instead of being placed at the Ohio Department of Youth Services. The family participated in the LIFE Program for four months and developed coping skills that eliminated the physical violence towards her parents. She continues to attend weekly AA/NA groups to maintain sobriety, has completed her G.E.D. and she successfully completed probation.

As this family's story exemplifies, Montgomery County's approach to inter-systemic and multi-agency collaboration is making a difference in the lives of youth and families.

