

The Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) Approach for Positive Juvenile Justice System Outcomes

THE MYSI APPROACH

The Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) employs a therapeutic group treatment approach, which utilizes components of positive youth development and cognitive behavioral therapy to help youth make positive and long-lasting changes. These therapeutic components are delivered to youth in a fully integrated treatment team approach where social-emotional competencies are learned and practiced.

The therapeutic process utilized by MYSI addresses two issues directly related to youth in juvenile justice systems. First is the cognitive therapies that are needed to address the adolescent's faulty beliefs and thinking errors which lead to impulsive and harmful choices. By examining their beliefs in a safe and supportive environment young people learn how their behavior impacts others. Through problem solving skills and reflective thinking, they learn to make healthier choices and relationship decisions.

The second issue relates to the cycle of abuse and trauma commonly referred to the "trauma outcome process". Once again in a safe and supportive environment as the staff and group discuss these issues they often find common ground and understanding of how they and others were impacted by these experiences. The focus is on the strengths developed to survive and recognize triggers, contain reactions and resolve their traumatic experiences to the best of their ability. This process becomes empowering by developing coping skills and an improvement in their ability to trust and form healthier relationships.

The MYSI approach is based on the award-winning Missouri Approach where youth stay together in small groups with the same staff and are treated in a humane and nurturing environment. The MYSI Approach establishes an organizational structure with clear lines of authority that empower and enhance accountability throughout the organization—from the director to the direct care staff—for effective implementation of the program. The therapeutic group approach is designed to keep youth safe and secure during their rehabilitative process and to reduce the number of youth that recidivate.

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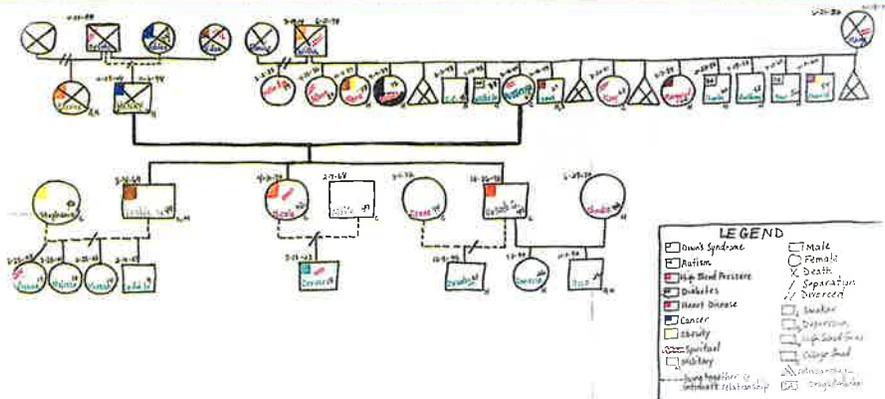
Mark D. Steward, Founder and Director of Missouri Youth Services Institute, speaks with a resident at a youth facility

The following beliefs serve as a basis for treatment programming within the MYSI Approach:

The MYSI approach is based on the belief that in order for youth to truly achieve long-lasting change and avoid re-offending, they must go through a process of self-exploration and a change process that addresses their history and family dynamics, and how those elements have influenced their present situation.

8. People are a combination of their past and present.

Youth have learned through a wide variety of experiences before they enter the agency. Often, their perceived negative behavior could have been a very natural response to their particular situation or family system. Additionally, a youth's reactions to a given situation are frequently based on perceptions from a much earlier stage of life and their experience at that time. Investigation of these perceptions may facilitate the change process.



A "genogram" depicting the history of an individual's biological and familial history

9. **All behavior has a purpose.** Even the most delinquent behavior is goal directed. It is either a conscious or unconscious (aware or unaware) attempt to get needs met. Our treatment approach is designed to help youth meet those needs by helping them investigate and understand their behavior and its effects, and to explore healthier alternatives.

10. **People need a sense of self-worth.** Improved self-esteem is an important aspect of the therapeutic process for youth. To maximize the opportunity for youth to be successful in our programs, as well as on the streets, we must take every opportunity to enhance the youth's self-esteem.

11. **Effective juvenile justice must be a balanced approach.** Effective juvenile justice systems should balance public safety, prevention and treatment. Treatment should be a seamless continuum of care from time of commitment to discharge in which youths' needs are met in a safe, structured environment with well-trained, caring staff who help them identify and address their issues.

12. **Human dignity is a basic value.** Human dignity goes beyond the basics of honor or respect to the essence of being human. It is reacting to the human dimension of every person. Human dignity is accorded to a person in as much as he or she is a person.

DIGNIFIED & UNDIGNIFIED BEHAVIOR	
DIGNITY	LACK OF DIGNITY
Trust	Humiliation
Listening	Scorn
Dialogue	Condescension
Empathy	Ignoring
A good word	Shouting
Consideration	Undermining other's confidence
Offering assistance	Blaming
Decency	Moralizing

FUNDAMENTALS

of the MYSI Approach

1. **Small, Non-Institutional Facilities Close to Home**

- Groups of 10-12 youth stay together with the same staff team at the same facility throughout the treatment process.
- The system may be divided by regions, with small, residential programs and different levels of care.
- The regions should try to ensure youth are no more than two hours from home.
- Facilities are designed to resemble home with comfortable “dayrooms,” shared, open sleeping dorms and walls adorned with artwork, motivational slogans and other appropriate items.



A Missouri style dormitory, which provides a homelike environment for supporting a therapeutic group process

2. **Integrated Treatment: Treating the Whole Person**

- Youth participate in a highly structured daily schedule focused on building healthy peer-to-peer and adult-to-youth relationships.
- Youth explore and develop self-awareness, insight, skills and leadership as they work on resolving core issues and attaining behavioral change.
- Predictable daily group meetings such as group circles and treatment activities keep youth involved in the group process.
- Youth are provided with educational and recreational opportunities, and encouraged to develop leadership skills.
- The program supports regular engagement with family and the community.

3. **Individual Care Within a Group Treatment Model**

- Small groups of 10-12 youth stay together at all times throughout the program (sleeping, eating, school, group meetings, chores, etc.)
- Groups check in regularly and meet daily for formal group treatment.
- Each youth has an individualized treatment team (group leader, service coordinator, one-on-one staff, teachers, etc.) that meets weekly to assess each youth's progress through stages of development and readiness for release.

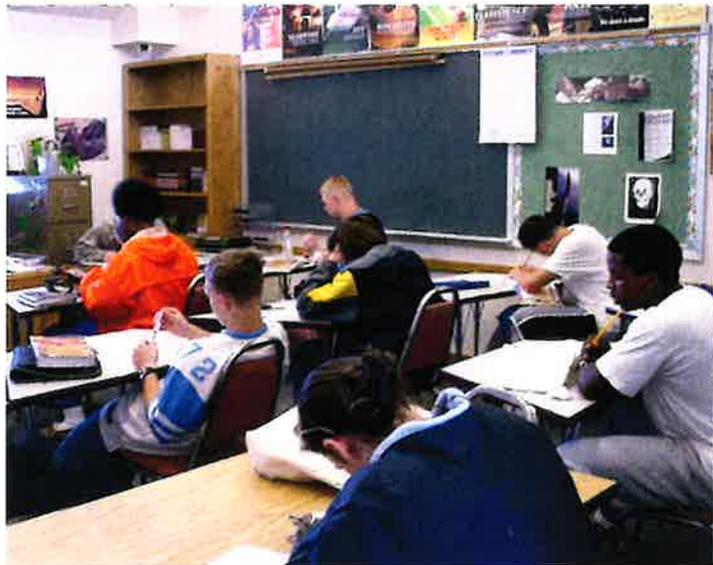
4. **Safety through Supervision, Structure and Relationships**

- Staff members are educated, culturally diverse and committed to helping youth make positive and lasting changes.
- Constant, active supervision of youth by staff (24/7 “eyes-on, ears-on supervision”) provides a secure, safe environment.
- The highly structured program schedule, including group meetings, school and activities, fosters responsibility and keeps youth engaged in the process.
- Appropriate, caring relationships between staff and youth encourage interpersonal accountability.

The principles on which the MYSI approach are founded address the whole person as a strategy for long term success - rather than punitive measures alone, which only offer short term results if any at all.

5. Integrated Treatment and Education

- Education is highly valued and supported within the treatment plan.
- Youth attend most of their general education classes together with their respective groups on a daily basis, with exceptions for special education and GED, college and vocational education courses, which youth may attend individually or with other groups.
- Youth specialists or on-line staff for each group provide support to teachers in the classroom and monitor the individual needs and progress of youth.
- Teachers and other classroom staff are members of each youth's individual treatment team.



In the MYSI approach, the education experience is a crucial part of the overall treatment plan

6. Families and Communities as Partners in Treatment

- Families are engaged in treatment as soon as a youth enters into a program.
- The program provides time for regular family visiting hours and communication each week.
- Family therapy is provided to help families and youth work through issues.
- Families are considered integral partners in planning for the youth's release and transition home.

7. Support from Transition through Aftercare

- One case manager (service coordinator) is assigned to each youth at intake and monitors the youth's progress from entry to transition home.
- An individualized service plan (ISP) guides the youth's progress during placement.
- Transitional planning begins at entry, intensifies prior to release and continues through aftercare.
- The period of aftercare depends on each youth's individual plan and needs.

PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

Move beyond traditional correctional models

Develop new approaches from best practices

Create safe environments

Help youth realize positive and lasting changes

Improve staff effectiveness and enhance skills

Facilitate youth skills and personal growth

Reduce recidivism and critical incidents

Involve families and communities

Utilize evidence-based systems to get results

Implementation COMPONENTS

Implementing the MYSI approach requires a significant commitment throughout a system to helping youth make positive, long-lasting changes. Facilitating small group interactions and processes, and promoting healthy, productive relationships and interactions are at the center of MYSI's group therapeutic approach and must be administered by caring, well-trained staff members. Additionally, facilities must be conducive to facilitating successful treatment programs. The following core components are critical for implementation:

Organizational Structure/Staffing Requirements

- Operationalizing the MYSI approach requires a unit management organizational structure. Unit management is assigning a specific treatment team of staff to work only with one group of youth. This structure enables the staff to consistently work with the same group of youth and develop therapeutic relationships with their respective group.

Group Therapeutic Treatment

- Effective group engagement and facilitation allows staff to create an atmosphere where youth are encouraged and supported to explore the roots of their past and current behaviors, develop and test new behaviors, practice healthy interactions, build relationships, and use the here and now to heal old wounds. Under this approach, it is imperative that staff provides enough structure and boundaries to ensure a safe and trusting group environment to increase the likelihood of success on any given task.



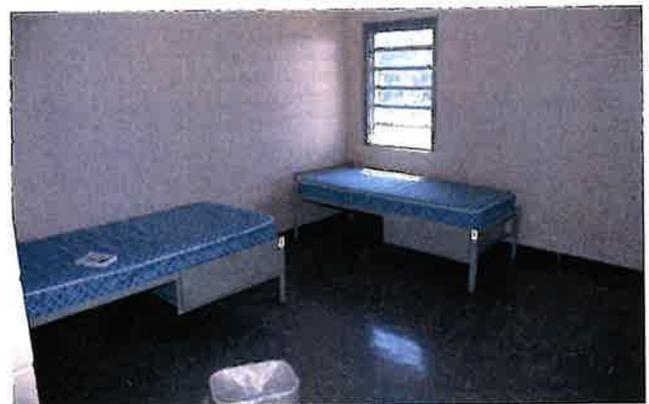
A facilitated group session is a key part of providing rehabilitation

Facility Environment

- MYSI standards recommend a facility size to accommodate four groups with a total of 40-48 youth. This size is ideal, but in many cases, the facility size is significantly increased because of the existing, available facility. The facility should have living units that resemble dorms versus individual cells. Additionally, it should have a more open layout to better facilitate awareness supervision and group interaction. Additional facility standards to facilitate the group treatment process and ensure youth safety are also necessary.



A Missouri style dorm room



A correctional dorm room

The MYSI PROCESS

MYSI initiates the following process in response to a potential client's inquiry regarding assistance. The purpose is to determine the interest, needs and resources of an organization and inform the potential design and implementation of the organizational change process.

Pre-Assessment Phase

Our team meets with organizational leaders to identify *interest, issues, strengths and challenges* and discuss the basics of the MYSI approach.

Site Visit:

We visit the site to evaluate the programs, assess the facilities and conduct interviews with staff and youth.

Leadership Overview:

Our team presents an in-depth overview of the MYSI approach and facilitates discussion regarding implementation implications.

Assessment of System

The MYSI team outlines key components and conducts ongoing assessments initially and throughout the transformation process with the following areas of focus: organizational vision, mission and beliefs, leadership capacity responsiveness, accountability and communication, safety factors, organizational structure, staffing patterns and dynamics, training, treatment program, physical plant, integration of services, data and community engagement.

Implementation Plan

Based on the assessment process, we engage the organization's leadership and designated staff in a strategic planning process to outline the implementation of the new approach.

The process includes addressing critical factors such as

- Identification of a start-up group
- Developing policies to reflect the new approach
- Training leadership and staff
- Coaching at various levels of the organization to help move a system from theory to practice.

The coaching component is an integral part of the change process and incorporates hands-on assistance, on-site observation and modeling to frontline staff, as well as ongoing consultation, feedback and recommendations to various levels of management.



Dr. Pili Robinson, MYSI Director of Consulting Services, has made supporting youth his life's work