

JUVENILE JUSTICE



Instituting restorative practices to build community and mitigate harm

In the United States, involvement with the juvenile justice system can have a long-lasting negative impact on one's life. For young people placed in detention facilities, their education, their ties to society, and their lives are disrupted. Involvement with the justice system—regardless of incarceration—can have implications for one's future earning potential and career trajectory, limiting access one has to educational opportunities, career fields, and available supports.

Afterschool and summer learning programs can mitigate risk and support the development of protective factors that help keep young people out of the juvenile justice system. The afterschool field can also serve as alternatives to detention that keep youth from re-offending. Through programming opportunities, partnerships, and coordinated efforts, afterschool programs keep young people safe, connect them to the supports they need, and help build protective factors and positive social connections that lead to bright futures.

Overview

Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities offers afterschool and summer learning programming at all nine schools in the Burlington School District (BSD). Alongside BSD, they have incorporated a district-wide restorative practices approach that focuses on building relationships and social capacity; improving problem-solving skills; encouraging empathy, accountability, and ownership; and building interpersonal skills among both youth and staff.

A typical day for students

Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities operates Monday through Friday from 2:50-5:30 p.m., serving students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Students choose from activities including the arts; science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); community engagement; recreation; and literacy and math support. Restorative practices are embedded into all aspects of programming and students practice skills each day that include building positive relationships and working collaboratively, no matter what activity they choose. For instance, Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities' Earn-A-Bike program teaches participants about biking, safe riding skills, and the fundamentals of complete bike maintenance and repair, with exposure to mechanic and STEM skills as possible career pathways. Over the course of the program, students work together to rebuild donated bicycles—which they ultimately get to take home—by employing organizational and planning skills, teamwork, and problem-solving.

Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities

Burlington, Vermont

1,700

Average number of students served during the school year

44%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- ▶ State subsidy funds
- ▶ Parent fees
- ▶ Local funding from the city and school district

Outcomes

Through Expanded Learning Opportunities' alignment with the Burlington School District, students have a more consistent and constant experience of the restorative approach. In a 2019 program staff survey, 95 percent of afterschool staff said that their restorative practices and social and emotional learning trainings were valuable. Approximately 8 in 10 staff reported that the overall culture and community in their program was better compared to previous years after the implementation of restorative practices and work in social and emotional learning (80 percent), and that they noticed an impact on their work with students (86 percent).

Program characteristics

Incorporated into all programming offered through Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities, restorative practices are defined as an approach designed to “develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships.”¹ Staff focus program participants on the actions of doing things with one another to create a sense of inclusion and shared responsibility through shared agreements. By incorporating restorative questions into the conflict resolution process, youth learn to collaboratively work through challenges and establish positive relationships with their peers and with adult mentors. For example, using a restorative approach, program staff create conflict corners, a physical space in the room where, if conflict arises between students, they can separate from each other, work through their emotions, and come back together to have a discussion to resolve their issues in a safe and supportive environment.

In order to support staff in implementing restorative practices, Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities has focused heavily on professional development opportunities. Their implementation of these practices was a part of a district-wide commitment to a restorative practices approach. Alongside school-day teachers, school administrators, and other school-based professionals, Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities staff have completed trainings and professional development opportunities. Several site directors participate in the monthly district-wide Restorative Practice Collaborative group, which meets to discuss the current progress, challenges, and successes in instituting the approach. All program staff, including leadership, administrative staff, and core staff, have completed district in-service trainings focused on restorative practices. In 2018, program site directors and assistant site directors worked with the Burlington Community Justice Center in a yearlong professional development cohort. Through this training, they used a restorative lens to create a progressive behavior matrix, which outlines best practices in responding to different kinds of program challenges, and a Restorative Communication Response tip sheet that was distributed to all staff members.



Challenges

Each component that helps determine one's prospects in life—education, employment, and future involvement with the justice system—can be adversely affected by involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Educational attainment. Youth in detention are more likely to be below grade level in academic achievement, suspended or been held back a grade in school, and suffering from learning disabilities. Young people who are incarcerated are also less likely to graduate from high school and involvement with the juvenile justice system may preclude youth from entrance to colleges and universities and access to financial aid.

Employment. A juvenile crime record can have an impact on young people's future earning potential and future employment, as many employers consider prior criminal involvement when evaluating candidates. Prior criminal records are a contributing reason why 71 percent of young people aged 17 to 24 are ineligible to serve in the military.

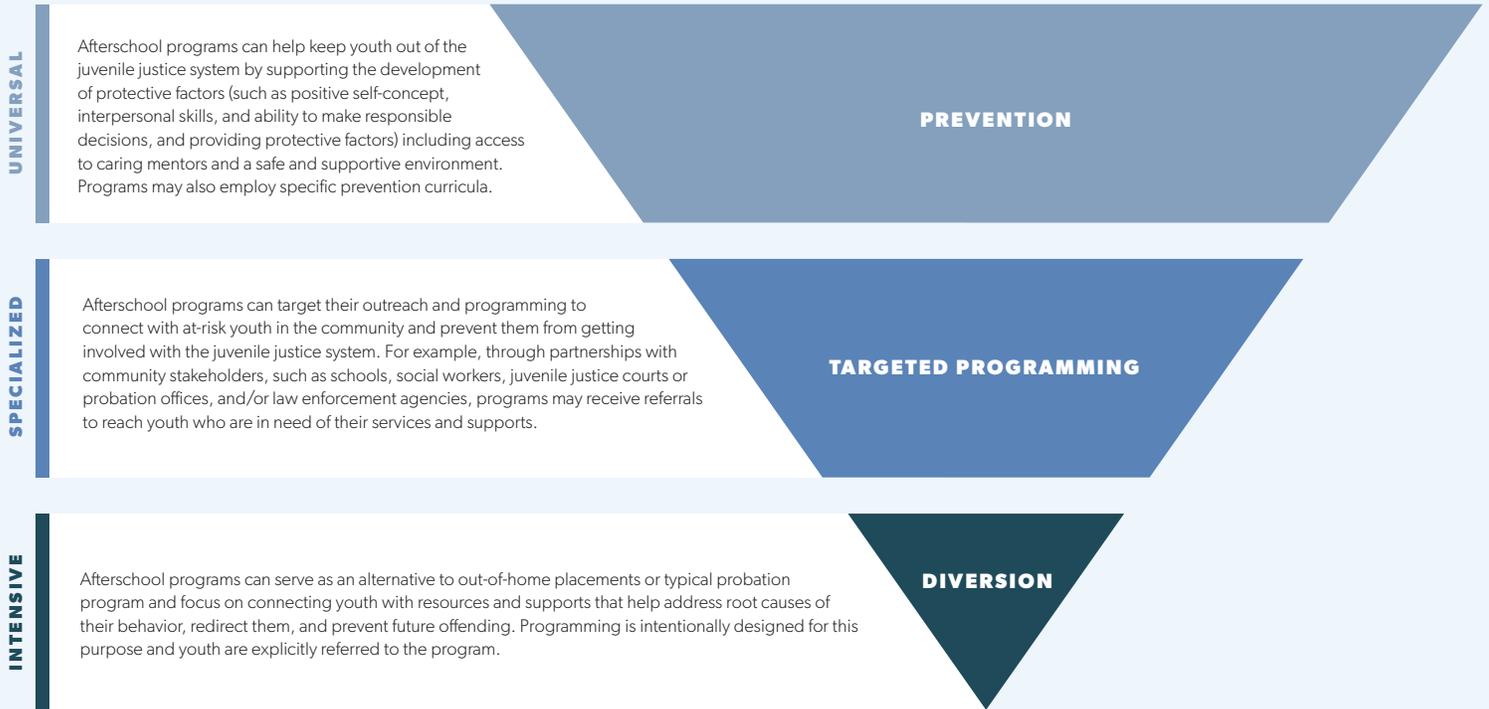
Future incarceration. Young people involved with the juvenile justice system are up to 16 percent more likely than their non-involved peers to be incarcerated as adults.

Read [From Prevention to Diversion: The Role of Afterschool in the Juvenile Justice System](#) to learn more.

¹ Wachtel, T. (2016). *Defining Restorative*. International Institute for Restorative Practices. Retrieved from <https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/>

The varying degree of roles that afterschool programs play

Afterschool programs can assist youth at-risk or involved with the juvenile justice system in many ways. Their role can vary depending on a number of factors, including the program's capacity, structure, and partnerships with other groups working with at-risk or justice-involved youth. Broadly, this involvement exists on a spectrum, with prevention being the most expansive category of activities and diversion focusing more specifically on one form of prevention; each of the three categories outlined build off of each other.



Program history

Burlington Expanded Learning Opportunities has provided afterschool programming to the community for more than 15 years. Burlington School District identified the incorporation of restorative practices as a priority in their 2016-2017 strategic plan, with the goal of creating a more equitable climate and culture for students. Expanded Learning Opportunities has since worked across the district to institute the “whole-school integrated approach” that incorporates the same approaches, common language, and techniques both in school and in out-of-school programming.

Recommendations

for instituting restorative practices:

- ▶ Reach out to local partners, such as school districts and your local Community Justice Center, to assess community needs and collaborate on implementation.
- ▶ Staff need support to do this work well! Provide comprehensive training for staff in order to ensure that they feel confident taking a restorative practices approach.
- ▶ Focus on engaging students in common restorative practices relationship-building techniques. One example includes “circles,” where students gather in a circle and have the opportunity to share thoughts, listen to their peers, build community, and productively work through issues raised.



Afterschool Alliance

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