



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

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## PEPNet: Connecting Juvenile Offenders to Education and Employment

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Research and practice show that long-term success in helping youth involved in the juvenile justice system prepare for economic self-sufficiency and productive citizenship requires strategies that address the developmental needs of these youth: a solid academic foundation, life skills, and good workplace attitudes and attributes.<sup>1</sup> The National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) recently completed a study in cooperation with the Youth Development and Research Fund and the Justice Policy Institute that suggests that employment and career-focused programs can prepare these youth for a successful transition to the workforce if the programs are comprehensive, sustained, and connected to further education or long-term career opportunities.

### The Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet)

PEPNet, administered by NYEC and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, provides information, materials, and publicity to organizations working with young offenders in both residential and community settings. PEPNet is a practice-based system that identifies and promotes effective youth development and employment programs and maintains an extensive database resource. During the past 6 years, PEPNet has created the PEPNet Criteria for Effective Practices, a framework for developing quality programming, and developed a national recognition system that has designated 58 youth programs as PEPNet Awardees.

To be eligible for the award, organizations complete a 40-page application detailing how their program meets the five PEPNet criteria (discussed in a later section). Awardees speak at conferences and receive national recognition and validation. PEPNet's growth into a premier resource on "what works" in youth development and employment has provided many networking opportunities. All Awardees' contact information is publicized, and

they regularly talk with other youth program specialists who are seeking information, advice, and ideas about quality programming. PEPNet encourages Awardees to share their success through workshops, phone inquiries, and online databases.

Several PEPNet Awardees work primarily with court-involved youth. Their programs reduce recidivism rates, prepare youth offenders for economic self-sufficiency, and help them develop the work and life skills and resources necessary to achieve long-term success. Five of the award-winning programs are listed below:

**Career Exploration Project (CEXP), Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), New York, NY**, is an alternative to incarceration for first-time youth felony offenders. Activities include a 1-month work readiness and personal development course followed by 10-week, part-time internships at small businesses and nonprofit agencies.

**Crispus Attucks YouthBuild, Crispus Attucks Community Development Corporation, York, PA**, is a 12-month program for nonviolent youth offenders, high school dropouts, and youth with special education needs. Participants alternate between renovating housing in low-income neighborhoods and completing classroom work that counts toward a high school diploma or general education development (GED) diploma.

**Fresh Start, Living Classrooms Foundation, Baltimore, MD**, is a 9-month program that provides hands-on work experiences and educational programs to youth recently released from a secure residential facility. Youth build and repair boats and engines, work in a marina, and have the opportunity to sail aboard foundation vessels.

**Gulf Coast Trades Center, New Waverly, TX**, operates a residential facility and a transition housing program that serve as an intermediate sanction for youth who have not succeeded on probation. The youth train in a selected trade and prepare for their GED. In addition, the program provides work experience, job placement, and followup services.

**Re-Integration of Offenders Youth Project (RIO-Y), Texas Youth Commission, Austin, TX**, operates in the Texas Youth Commission's residential facilities. Participants receive help in

<sup>1</sup> Task Force on Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth. 2000. *Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth*. Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. NCJ 182787.

entering the workforce, such as preemployment counseling, job readiness skills, and career exploration, in addition to the education, resocialization, specialized treatment, and tailored aftercare services all youth at the facility receive.

Each of these programs incorporates PEPNet's youth development and workforce development principles within the constraints of the juvenile justice system and has a recidivism rate of less than 20 percent. More detailed profiles of these PEPNet Awardees are available at [www.nyec.org/pepnet](http://www.nyec.org/pepnet).

## PEPNet Criteria

PEPNet's operating framework falls into five broad categories:

**Purpose and activities.** Effective juvenile justice programs view themselves as rehabilitation projects rather than disciplinary programs. For example, RIO-Y's stated mission is "to provide incarcerated youth with postrelease career training opportunities and with youth development skills necessary for them to find and maintain employment as productive members of society." Gulf Coast Trades Center's program is designed around a philosophy that "stresses the worth and dignity of each person." Each program incorporates long-term support (for at least 12 months) following a youth's completion of the program.

**Organization and management.** Collaboration is particularly strong among the most effective youth offender programs, enabling them to leverage available resources. RIO-Y is a collaboration between the Texas Youth Commission and the workforce investment system. At Crispus Attucks YouthBuild, social services agencies, local businesses, and other organizations provide an estimated \$500,000 a year in in-kind contributions that include workshops, training, childcare, counseling, construction materials, and office space. Partnerships with employers guarantee that program participants have quality work experiences.

**Youth development.** Positive youth development programs look beyond youth problems and tend to stress young people's strengths and assets to encourage growth. The PEPNet Awardees set high expectations and demand accountability, ranging from attendance requirements to postrelease drug testing. They provide participants opportunities for responsibility and leadership, such as the youth-run boatbuilding and chairmaking businesses at Fresh Start and the youth policy committee at Crispus Attucks.

**Workforce development.** All PEPNet programs integrate academic, vocational, and work readiness instruction.

**Evidence of success.** All PEPNet programs document the outcomes of their graduates in terms of rearrest, reincarceration, and postcompletion employment results over at least a 12-month period.

PEPNet's free resources include:

- ◆ The *PEPNet Criteria Workbook*, which contains the PEPNet self-assessment and continuous improvement processes along with the criteria themselves.
- ◆ The *Index to Effective Practices*, with more than 500 specific techniques and strategies from PEPNet Awardees.
- ◆ Information about funding support for PEPNet Awardees and the youth populations they serve.
- ◆ Onsite training by PEPNet staff.

## For Further Information

For more information about PEPNet and its related activities, contact:

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