

# Strength-based Service Delivery for Youth:

*Theory, Research, Practice and Results*

**Building on Family Strengths**

**Research Plenary**

**June 24, 2005**

# **Strength-based Service Delivery for Youth:** *Theory, Research, Practice and Results*

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# RECLAIMING THE FUTURES OF YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

## RECLAIMING FUTURES

Communities helping teens  
overcome drugs, alcohol and crime

*Laura Nissen, Ph.D.*  
*National Program Director*

# Overarching Questions That Guide Community Change

- 1. What do youth struggling with substance use disorders, as well as related and overlapping life challenges most need to be successful?**
- 2. What would community-institutional partnerships look like if they were able to provide that?**
- 3. How can we move the system in this direction?**



# What is Reclaiming Futures?

- **A new approach to helping teenagers who are caught in the cycle of drugs, alcohol and crime**
- **A \$21-million, five-year initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**
- **Vision: Communities that reclaim youth involved in the juvenile justice system through appropriate, comprehensive and individualized responses to substance abuse and delinquency.**



# Why it's needed

- **America's juvenile justice system faces a public health crisis**
- **As many as four in five teens in trouble with the law are abusing drugs and alcohol**
- **Yet as many as 80 percent receive NO treatment**
- **Research shows treating drug and alcohol abuse reduces crime, saves money and builds safer communities**



# Reclaiming Futures

**More Treatment  
and Related  
Services**

**Better  
Treatment and  
Related  
Services**

**More Than  
Treatment**

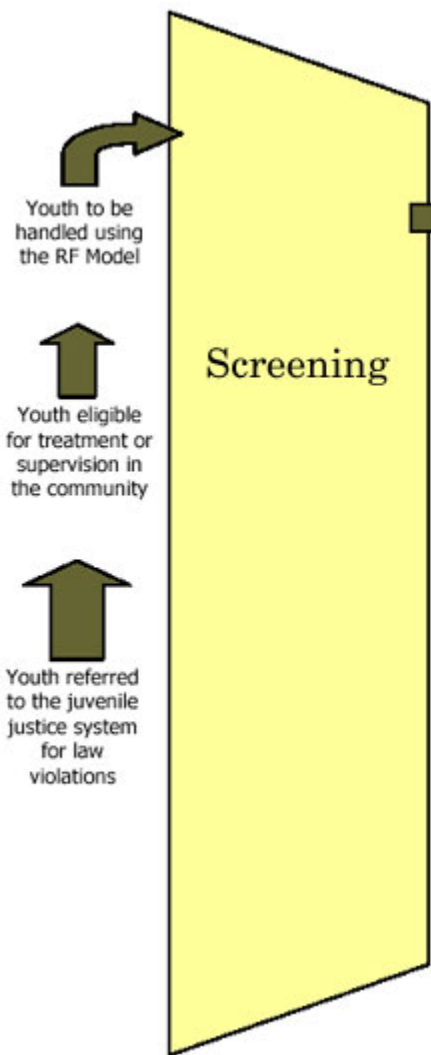


# Reclaiming Futures

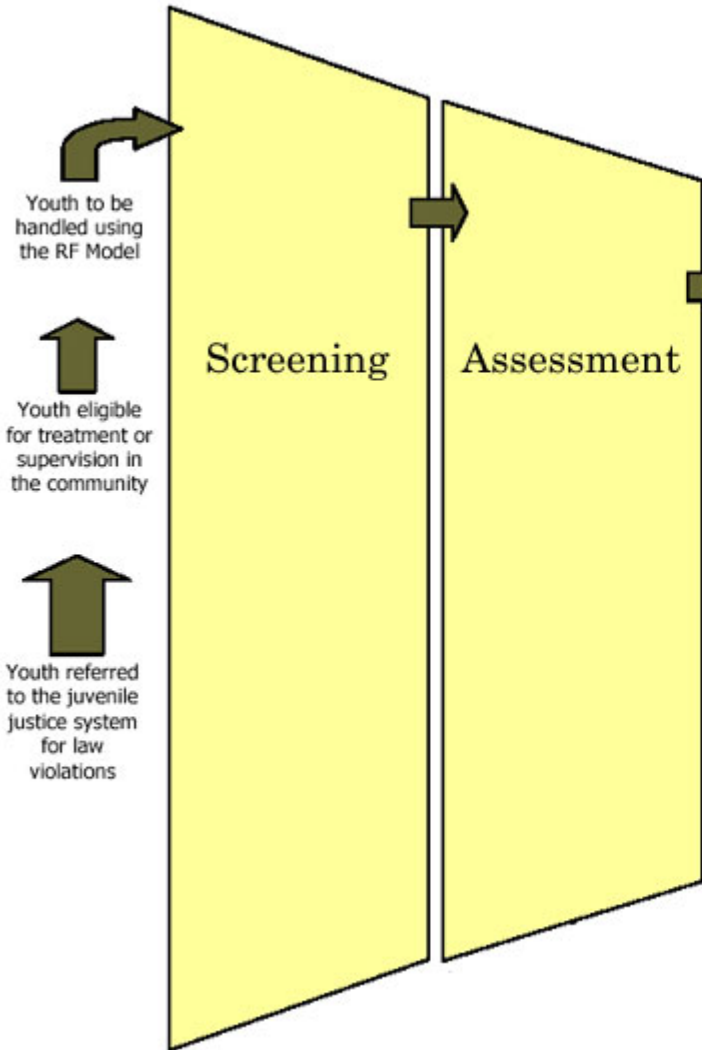
- **Reclaiming Future's accomplishments**
  - **Launched program on national and local levels**
  - **Organized the evidence base and made it accessible to groups nationally**
  - **Conducted research to establish benchmark**
  - **Created the national six-step model**
  - **Built various tool kits to address key aspects of community and organizational change**



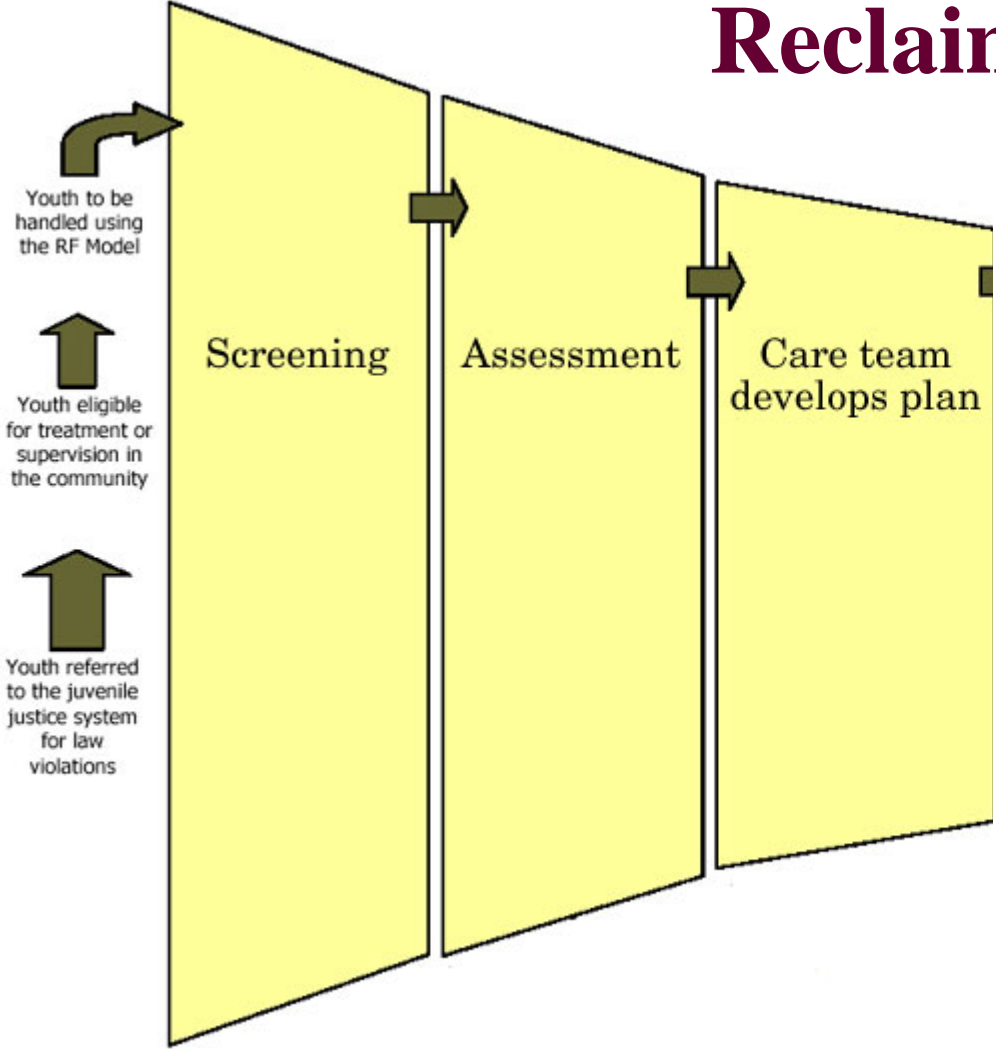
# Reclaiming Futures



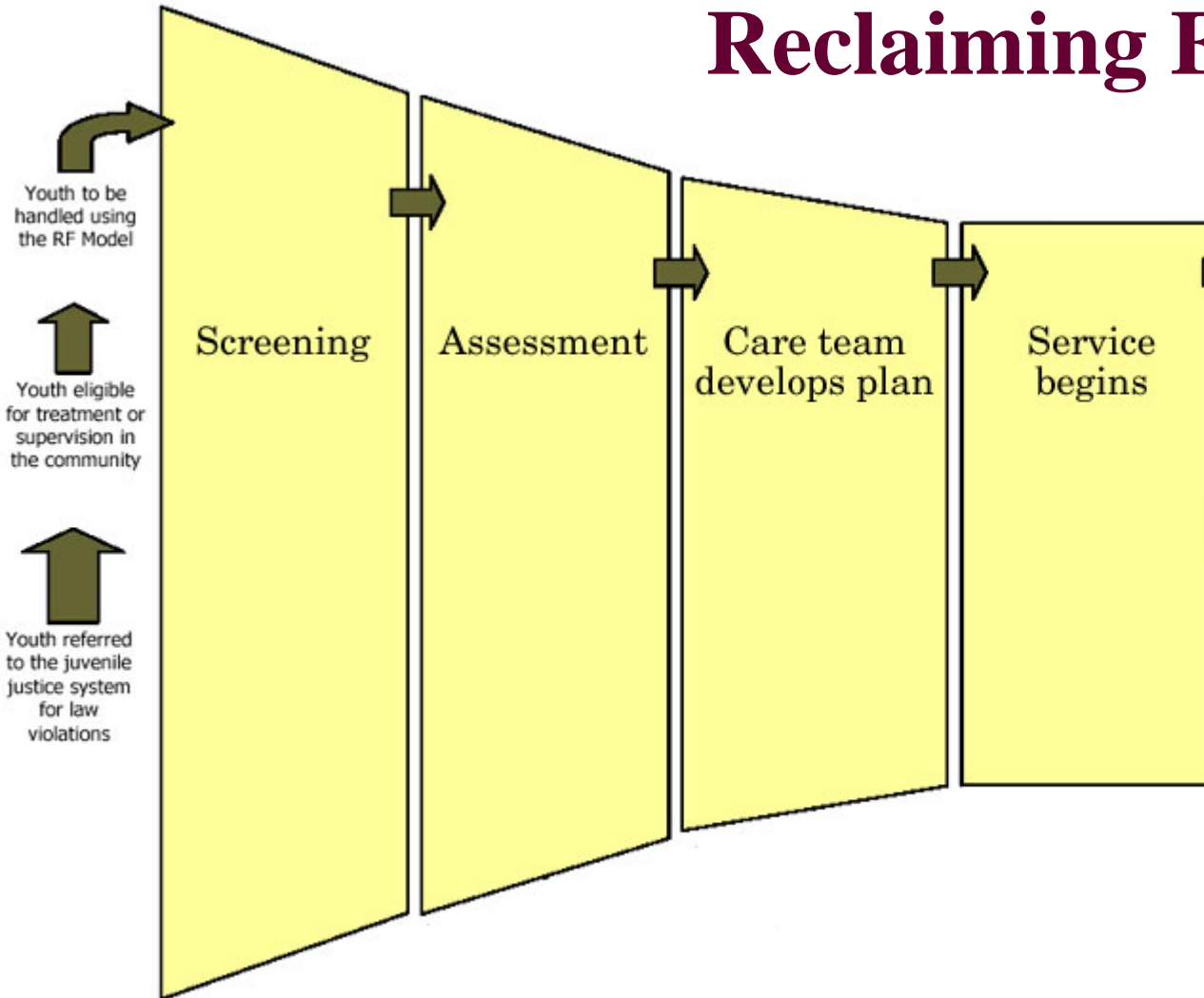
# Reclaiming Futures



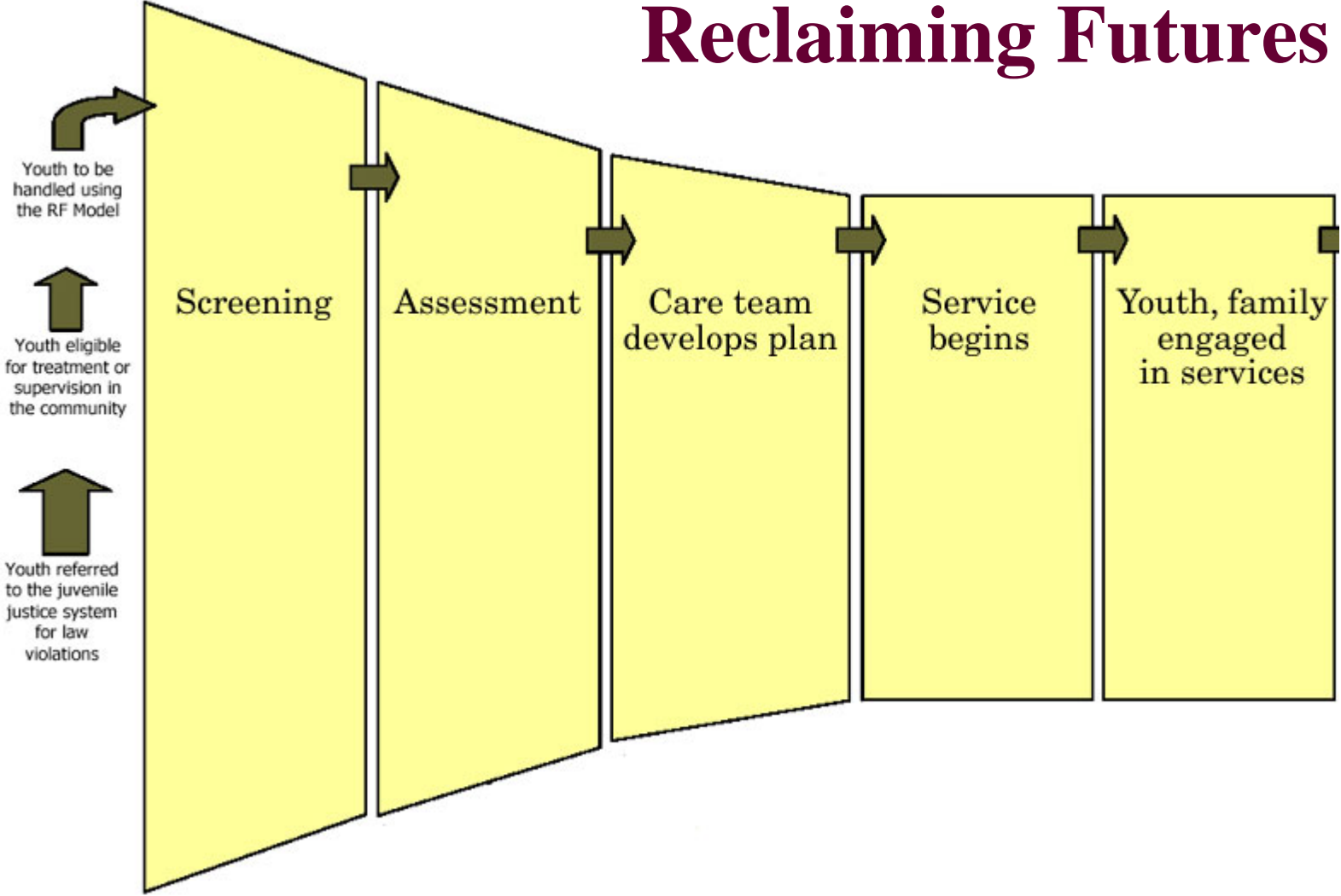
# Reclaiming Futures



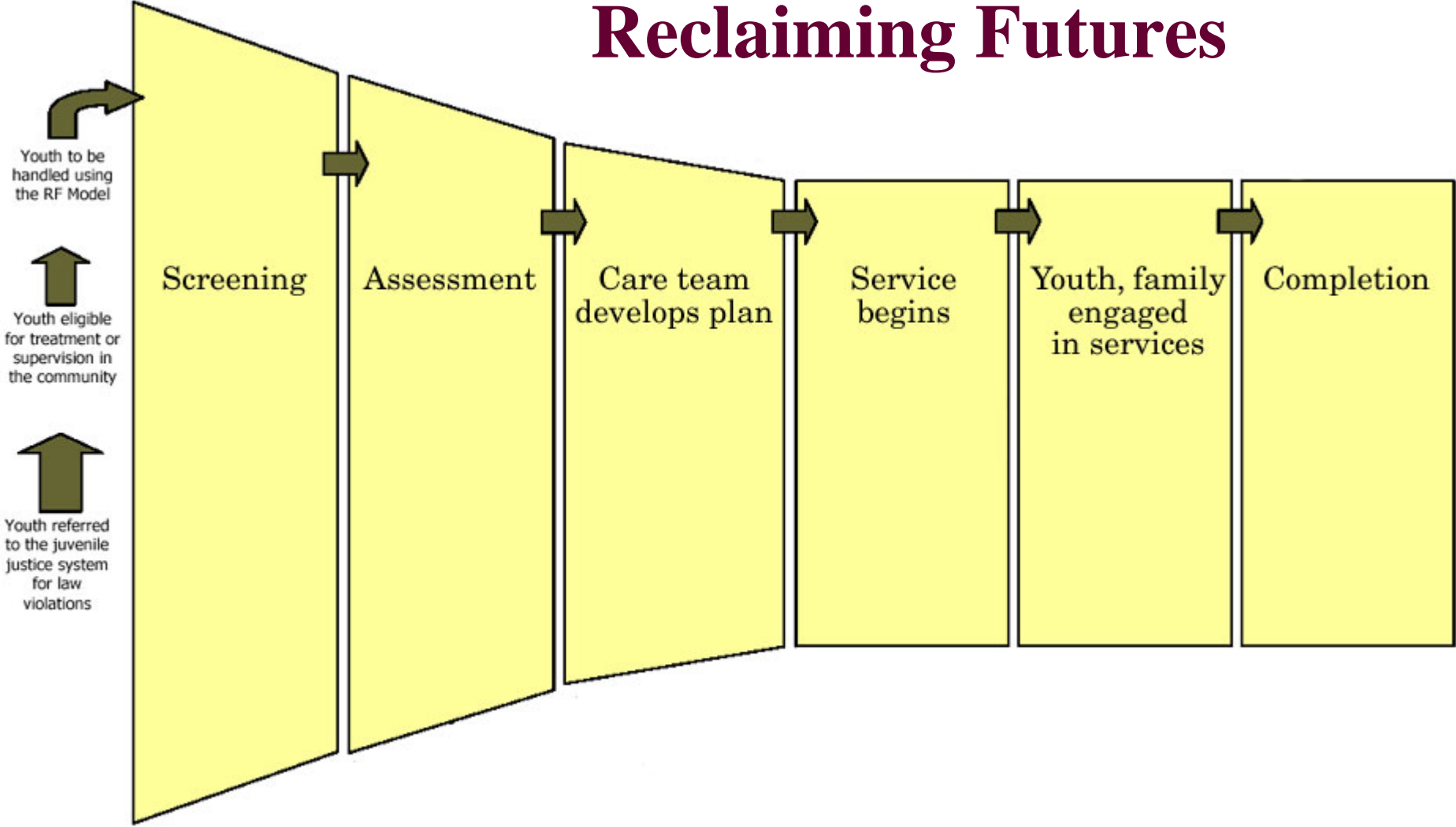
# Reclaiming Futures



# Reclaiming Futures



# Reclaiming Futures





# Reclaiming Futures

- **Our accomplishments**
  - **Ten sites chosen with diverse communities**
  - **Three years into their projects**
    - Have designed tailored approaches
    - Are seeing kids and seeing change



# Reclaiming Futures

- **What we have learned as a national program**
  - **Leadership**
  - **Systems change**
  - **Communications**
    - **More treatment, better treatment, more than treatment**
    - **Community involvement is long term solution**
    - **Focus on common ground between treatment and justice, and community safety and ownership**



# **Preliminary Findings - Reclaiming Futures National Evaluation**

- **Surveys of juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment systems**
  - **10 Reclaiming Futures sites**
  - **Several times between 2003 and 2005**
  - **20 to 30 respondents per community**
  - **13 indices of system effectiveness (Agency Collaboration, Information Sharing, Systems/Services Integration, Cultural Competence, Treatment Effectiveness, Family Involvement, etc.)**



# Preliminary Findings - Reclaiming Futures National Evaluation (cont.)

- **Results**

- **12 of 13 indices increased over the first two years of the initiative across all 10 communities**
- **Only the index measuring respondent satisfaction with agency partnerships declined slightly, and this could easily be due to heightened expectations rather than declining performance**



# Communities Reporting Significant Improvements

- **Number of Reclaiming Futures Communities Reporting Statistically Significant Improvements Between Nov 2003 and Jan 2005:**
  - Resource Management - 5 Communities (of 10 total)
  - Data Sharing - 5 Communities
  - Systems Integration - 6 Communities
  - Use of Client Information - 7 Communities
  - Availability of Targeted Treatment - 7 Communities
  - Perceived Treatment Effectiveness - 9 Communities
  - Family Involvement in Services - 7 Communities



# Reclaiming Futures

- **What's next for us**
  - **Evaluation**
  - **Long term changes**
- **What's next for the field**
  - **Keep issue visible**
  - **Coordinate local, state, national efforts**
  - **Get involved!**



*Youth Competency Assessment:  
Integration of a Strengths  
Approach into Juvenile Justice*

## *What is it?*

- A strength-based assessment tool and protocol
- For professionals working with youth and families
- Developed for use in the juvenile justice system
- Also appropriate for other treatment providers or prevention program staff

## *Who developed it?*

- NPC Research, Portland, Oregon
- Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Developed and tested in collaboration with three county juvenile justice agencies in Oregon
- National Advisory Board also provided expertise

## *Why was it developed?*

- To address a critical gap in the juvenile justice system and adolescent treatment systems: **Inclusion of strengths in the assessment process**

## *What areas are covered?*

- The domains of the YCA address three primary goals:
  - Support efforts to **repair harm and support development of pro-social norms and values**
  - Provide specific indicators for pathways toward a **healthy identity**
  - **Connect youth** to community, family, and peers

## *A. Repairing Harm, Developing Pro-Social Norms and Values*

- Learn important lessons from their behavior/choices
- Facilitate moral development
- Reduce antisocial attitude: a major criminogenic risk factor
- Increase public safety and restitution for victims
- Modify behavior

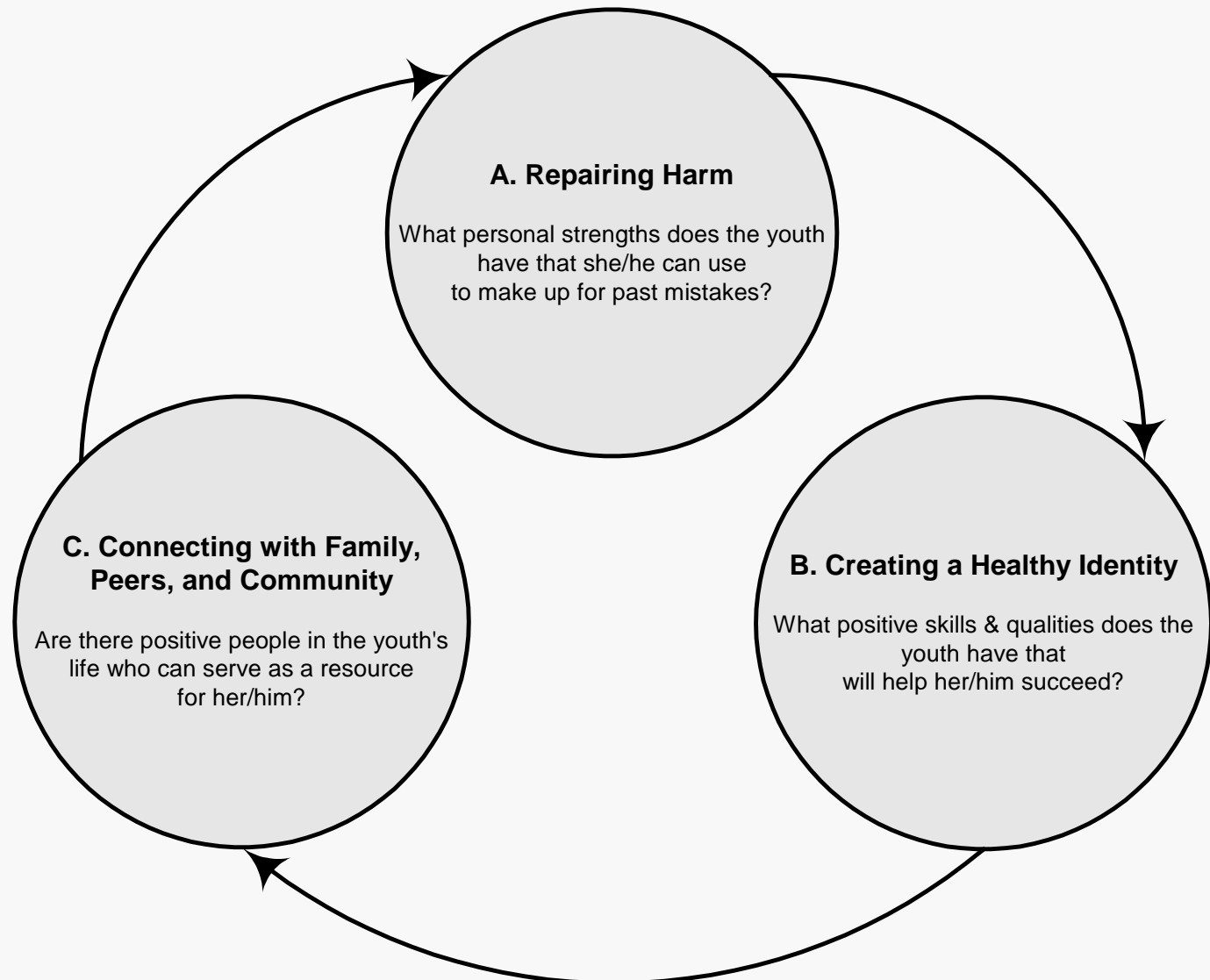
## *B. Creating a Healthy Identity*

- Identity development is a central task of adolescence
- Identification of skills, competencies, interests, and goals for the future
- Identification of resources to support this growth
- Help others in youth's environment recognize and confirm youth's positive identity
- Positive psychology and positive reinforcement

## *C. Connecting to Family, Peers, and Community*

- Strong connections with families, positive peers, and community are protective:
  - Less likely to commit crimes and more respectful of others
  - Greater health
  - Increased positive social control
- There may be a need to advocate for community support for youth

# *Youth Competency Assessment (YCA) Model*



## *Results: Staff focus groups*

- Helps gather more and different information
- Helps youth and family feel more comfortable, share more, and buy into the process (motivates changes)
- Helps identify ideas and resources
- Makes follow-up appointments more enjoyable
- Facilitates quicker completion of court requirements and reduced need for sanctions

## *Results: Youth self-report*

- Rated the first few meetings with the department as more positive than comparison site youth
- Were more likely to say that their counselor/probation officer cared about their point of view

## *Results: Youth self-report*

- Were more than twice as likely to report that their counselor/probation officer asked them about their (youths') strengths
- Were less likely to report that their counselor/probation officer talked about what they did wrong

## *Results: Ratings of videotaped interviews*

- Increased use of strengths-based practice (compared to non-YCA interviews)
- Improved use of positive non-verbal cues and more positive interview atmosphere (compared to non-YCA interviews)

## *Results: Coding of case materials*

- Pilot site assessments (83% = “a lot”) included more information about “Creating a Healthy Identity” than the comparison site (52% = “a lot”)
- None of the pilot sites lacked information in this area, though 10% of the comparison assessments did

## *Results: Coding of case materials*

- 77% of pilot assessments included “a lot” of information about “Connecting with family, peers, and community,” but none (0%) of the comparison assessments did
- 61% of comparison assessments had no information about this domain, but none of the pilot counties lacked this information

## *Results: Coding of case materials*

- 49% of pilot assessments included “a lot” of information about “Repairing Harm” and none (0%) of the comparison counties did
- 23% of comparison assessments included no information about this domain compared to 10% of pilot assessments

## *Results: Coding of case materials*

- **Creating a Healthy Identity:** 76% of pilot and 32% of comparison plans included this domain
- **Connecting with Family, Peers, & Community:** 65% of pilot and 42% of comparison plans included this domain
- **Repairing Harm:** 38% of pilot and 67% of comparison plans included this domain

## *For more information*

- Go to [www.npcresearch.com](http://www.npcresearch.com)
- Click on “Materials”
- Go to section on “Youth Competency Assessment” for the training manual and trainer’s guide