**Growth-Focused Youth Justice Case Management©**

**Introduction to the Framework**

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**The Situation**

Growth-Focused Youth Justice Case Management (GFCM) is a practice framework for Juvenile Probation Officers which supports them in organizing and carrying out their duties and responsibilities in a manner that facilitates youth growth.[[1]](#endnote-1) Most youth mature or grow out of offending as a function of normal development,[[2]](#endnote-2) a process known as desisting from offending. A key challenge for Probation Officers is working effectively with youth whose growth has stalled or become arrested[[3]](#endnote-3) and youth whose growth, though not arrested, is less than optimal. In both cases, previous developmentally harmful experiences are often causative or correlating risk factors.

**Barriers to Growth**

**Up to 90% of justice-involved youth report exposure to some type of traumatic event. On average, 70% meet criteria for a mental health disorder with approximately 30% meeting the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).**

**(Dierkhising et al., 2013)**

Youth with arrested or poor development are at heightened risk for chronic and serious offending.[[4]](#endnote-4) While chronic and serious offending does sometimes require restrictive measures of control, behavior change by complying with restrictive measures is more likely to be temporary.[[5]](#endnote-5) An additional approach is to deal with youth in a manner that accelerates their growth[[6]](#endnote-6) and in so doing helps them form identities with which offending is incompatible. Desistance research confirms that this can actually be done. The GFCM framework is based on this research, as well as positive development and brain development research.

**The Need**

The GFCM framework guides Probation Officers in producing powerful growth experiences for youth through their interaction with them. Fostering and accelerating youth growth can be achieved when youth have powerful positive *developmental* *experiences*.[[7]](#endnote-7) This doesn’t always happen in the justice system. We know, for example, that experiences associated with typical formal processing of youth have not demonstrated a crime control effect.[[8]](#endnote-8) In particular, youth that begin their offending early and judge the justice process to be illegitimate are not swayed into compliance by their interactions with authorities.[[9]](#endnote-9) We also know that outcomes are poor for youth that have a negative perception of Probation Officers (e.g., negative behavior, use of restrictions).[[10]](#endnote-10) In other words, the youth’s experience in the justice system needs to be focused on their potential, their growth. So how do we do this while still dealing with serious offenses and the imperative of community safety?

**In a transformed juvenile justice system, agencies would foster youth’s innate potential, take concerted efforts to help remove the stigma and collateral consequences attached to justice system involvement, and also prepare youth to become positive leaders in their communities.**

**(Neelum Arya, “Family-Driven Justice,” Arizona Law Review, 2014)**

**The Framework**

This case management framework provides youth with four powerful experiences that support and accelerate their growth. They are based on neuroscience regarding cognitive processes that translate what happens to and around us into our subjective or inner experiences of our world and, therefore, determines our behavior.[[11]](#endnote-11) The experiences are presented below with the cognitive processes shown in bold print. Included with each experience is a related *developmental task* that youth must undertake in order to form a positive identity, which is the primary goal of youth development.[[12]](#endnote-12) Identity formation is also directly related to desisting from offending.[[13]](#endnote-13),[[14]](#endnote-14)

* Exploring who one is and can become in a manner that generates positive **perceptions** of self. Developmental task: Self-exploration based on a sense of trust that one’s life will be supported.
* Discovering one’s strengths, weaknesses, and special qualities in a manner that focuses **attention** on a positive future for oneself. Developmental task: Self-discovery based on a sense of one’s autonomy (e.g., appropriate independence).
* Efficacy in the form of believing in one’s ability to change in a manner that spurs one to **plan to act**. Developmental task: Self-efficacy based on a sense of initiative.
* Realization of one’s potential by taking on positive social roles in a manner that allows one to establish a positive **identity**. Developmental task: Self-realization based on a sense of industry (e.g., unrelenting drive to accomplish what one sets out to do).

In GFCM, the Probation Officer facilitates the above four experiences with the bonus being that facilitation is done in a manner that involves youth in building their case plans, as follows below.

* Exploring who one can become. Youth’s ideal future self informs case plan’s **long-term goal**.
* Discovering one’s strengths and weaknesses. Youth’s weaknesses (i.e., risk factors) are barriers to ideal self and **short-term goals** set forth how youth’s strengths will help counter weaknesses.
* Efficacy thinking and beliefs regarding one’s ability to change. Youth participates in coming up with **action steps** for attaining short-term goals.
* Realization of one’s potential through positive social roles. Positive youth roles are included as ways for youth to work with service providers to **follow through** on action steps.

To facilitate the above growth experiences while building a growth-focused case plan, the Probation Officer’s work needs to be structured and effective. GFCM provides both.

**Structure**: Four broad and flexible phases, each of which has one core practice or way of interacting with youth to facilitate powerful growth experiences.

**Effectiveness**: The four experiences naturally involve the youth in using and developing four social cognition skills.[[15]](#endnote-15) These skills support growth and are demonstrated by what are called “Youth Wins.” Each Youth Win is about the youth’s involvement in the case planning process. Again, case plan development is a growth opportunity for the youth, not just a chore for the Probation Officer. The Youth Wins and social cognition skills facilitated by the Probation Officer are as follows:

* Youth verbally expresses an ideal self. Social cognition skill: awareness of self.
* Youth verbally expresses strengths and goals. Social cognition skill: stable concept of self.
* Youth identifies action steps to reach short-term goals. Social cognition skill: having realistic beliefs about one’s capabilities.
* Youth works with services on action steps. Social cognition skill: committing to positive goals.

**The Benefits**

1. Probation Officer’s core practices or primary ways of interacting with youth support four critical adolescent developmental tasks associated with forming a positive identity.
* Why It Matters: By supporting developmental tasks, the Probation Officer’s interaction accelerates the youth’s growth.
1. Youth’s participation in building the case plan is a natural and integral part of how the Probation Officer interacts with youth.
* Why It Matters: The case planning process itself becomes a growth experience for the youth, consistent with the evidence-based principle of making every contact or interaction an opportunity for change.

**Since desistance is about discovering agency, interventions need to encourage and respect self-determination; this means working with offenders not on them (McCullogh 2005; McNeil, 2006).**

1. Focus shifts from only dealing with what youth have done to also moving them toward who they can become; from only managing risk to also realizing possibilities.
* Why It Matters: The overall experience of justice involvement in general and of the case plan in particular is what the youth can move toward (i.e., approach motivation and approach goals) as opposed to what they must move away from (i.e., avoidance motivation and avoidance goals). Behavior rooted in approach motivation increases psychological well-being,[[16]](#endnote-16) whereas avoidance motivation is linked to lower well-being and higher levels of anxiety, anger, and frustration.[[17]](#endnote-17)
1. For an understanding of the importance of focusing on development see: John A. Tuell, Jessica Heldman, and Kari Harp, “Developmental Reform in Juvenile Justice: Translating the Science of Adolescent Development to Sustainable Practice,” Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps – RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Laurence Steinberg, Elizabeth Cauffman, and Kathryn C. Monahan, “Psychosocial Maturity and Desistance From Crime in a Sample of Serious Juvenile Offenders,” Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, March 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Carly B. Dierkhising et al., “Trauma Histories Among Justice-Involved Youth: Findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network,” *European Journal of Psychtraumatology,* 2013; also see the correlation between growth and vulnerability in: Maarten Vansteenkiste and Richard M. Ryan, “On Psychological Growth and Vulnerability: Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Need Frustration as a Unifying Principle,” *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration,* Vol. 23, No. 3, 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Fergus McNeill, “A Desistance Paradigm for Offender Management,” *Criminology and Criminal Justice,* Sage Publications, 2006 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Michael Rocque, Chad Posick, and Helene R. White, “Growing Up Is Hard to Do: An Empirical Evaluation of Maturation and Desistance,” *Journal of Developmental Life Course Criminology,* 2015; concept of accelerating growth is associated with protective factors and processes referred as “facilitative agents” or “triggering agents” that drive development, see: Paul W. Marko, “Exploring Facilitative Agents that Allow Ego Development to Occur,” in *The Postconventional Personality,* SUNY Press, 2011 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Jack J. Bauer and Dan P. McAdams, “Eudaimonic Growth: Narrative Growth Goals Predict Increases in Ego Development and Subjective Well-Being Three Years Later,” *Developmental Psychology,* Vol. 46, No. 4, 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Anthony Petrosino, Carolyn Turpin-Pertrosino, Sarah Guckenburg, “Formal System Processing of Juveniles: Effects on Delinquency,” The Campbell Collaboration, *Campbell Systematic Reviews,* January 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Megan Bears Augustyn, “The (Ir)relevance of Procedural Justice in the Pathways to Crime,” *Law and Human Behavior,* Vol. 39, No. 4, 2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. “Perceptions and Outcomes in Adolescent Confinement,” 2014 Knowledge Brief, Research on Pathways to Desistance [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. John J. Ratey, M.D., *A User’s Guide to the Brain: Perception, Attention, and the Four Theaters of the Brain,* Random House, 2001 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jane Kroger, *Identity in Adolescence: The Balance Between and Other,* Routledge Publisher, 2004 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Rebecca Stone, “Desistance and Identity Repair: Redemption Narratives as Resistance to Stigma,” *British Journal of Criminology,* 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ray Paternoster and Shawn Busway, “Desistance and the ‘Feared Self’: Toward An Identity Theory of Criminal Desistance,” *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology,* Vol. 99, No. 4, 2009 (also includes discussion of the “ideal self” which is included in GFCM) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Charlyn Harper Browne, Ph.D., *Youth Thrive: Advancing Healthy Adolescent Development and Well-Being,* Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Andrew J. Elliot and Todd M. Thrash, “Approach-Avoidance Motivation in Personality: Approach and Avoidance Temperaments and Goals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* Vol, 82, No. 5, 2002 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Jack Bauer, Dan P. McAdams, and April R. Sakaeda, “Crystallization of Desire and Crystallization of Discontent in Narratives of Life-Changing Decisions,” *Journal of Personality,* Vol. 73, No. 5, 2005 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)