

STAGE TWO: INITIATION

YOUTH LEVEL OF SERVICE/CASE MANAGEMENT INVENTORY (YLS/CMI)

If the juvenile justice system is to achieve a reduction in recidivism through the prevention of delinquent behavior, it must adhere to the three principles of risk, need, and responsivity. A necessary first step in this process is the introduction and use of a valid and reliable assessment instrument, such as the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), to measure both a youth's risk and needs. This information can then be used to determine appropriate levels of supervision, to establish measurable, case-specific goals, and to better allocate resources in order to achieve effective outcomes for juveniles, their families, and our communities.

The process of assessing level of risk has developed over many years. At first, professional judgment was used alone; however, the results of this approach were not all that effective. The next generation of assessments used actuarial tools that focused on static risk factors such as delinquent history. Third and fourth generation risk assessments are now available, which assist in identifying both static and dynamic risk factors that contribute to a youth's behavior. Applying appropriate interventions (i.e., matching services based on those risk factors) can facilitate behavioral change and potentially reduce recidivism. As assessments have improved, so have services, which have become better-informed by youth developmental theory and more directly matched to known criminogenic needs.

In June 2008, the Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers and staff from the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission embarked on a comprehensive review of various risk assessment tools designed for juvenile offenders. With the assistance of the National Youth Screening and Assessment Project (NYSAP) and support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, members of the Executive Committee chose to pilot the YLS/CMI risk assessment instrument. Since then, the majority of Pennsylvania's juvenile probation departments have incorporated the YLS/CMI into their daily practices, with the goal of statewide utilization. Support for the project continues through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), with ongoing assistance from NYSAP.

The YLS/CMI is based on the Level of Service Inventory (LSI), developed by Don Andrews in 1982 for use with adult offenders in parole release and supervision. A version of the LSI was subsequently devised for use with adolescents and was called the Youth Level of Service Inventory (YLSI; Andrews, Robinson, & Hoge, 1984).

The YLS/CMI is a valid and reliable risk instrument that assesses risk for recidivism by measuring 42 risk/need factors over the following eight domains:

- prior and current offenses
- family circumstances/parenting
- education/employment
- peer relations
- substance abuse
- leisure/recreation
- personality/behavior
- attitudes/orientation.

Any of the domains may also be identified as an area of strength.

Ultimately, a youth is assigned an overall risk level of Low, Moderate, High, or Very High, based on the aforementioned domains and other factors gathered through a structured interview/information-gathering process. Under certain circumstances dictated by policy, a professional may increase or decrease the assigned risk level (i.e., "override" the assessment results). The assessed risk level is to be used to inform the juvenile justice professional of the level of supervision and intervention targets.

Efforts to implement the YLS/CMI throughout Pennsylvania have proven successful, but not without a constant level of education and training of staff and others. Buy-in of stakeholders, leadership, the development of supervision and case management policies and procedures, proper administration of the tool, and the sharing of implementation strategies have all been critical to successful implementation. The opportunity to gather important data and to evaluate outcomes will prove very valuable to the system as we move forward.