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## **Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice Sees Improvement with Assessments.com's Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT)**

*Workshop at National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Conference  
Outlines Statewide Effort to Reduce Recidivism Among Florida Juveniles*

**CHICAGO, IL** – As the U.S. tops more than \$1 trillion in national federal deficits in the first nine months of the fiscal year, juvenile justice too is starting to feel the pinch. As a result, agencies across the country, like the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FL DJJ), are trying diligently to reduce unnecessary costs. FL DJJ believes it has found a practical, scientific, evidence-based solution – reducing high-cost residential commitments for lower-risk youth who are statistically unlikely to commit new crimes, and providing a better targeted and more focused rehabilitative effort on the higher-risk juveniles who are quite likely to reoffend in the absence of effective, positive behavioral treatment.

According to two officials from the FL DJJ who made a presentation recently in Chicago at the 2009 National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) Conference, this approach is favored in these tough economic times because it has been proven to work. "Applying the three key principles of Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) – risk, need and responsivity – has allowed us to spend our scarce resources where they are most needed," said Cathy Lake, Chief Probation Officer for Florida's Circuit 18. "In Florida, we are getting smarter about preserving public safety and getting better at turning young lives around."

In 2006, FL DJJ began conducting PACT (Positive Achievement Change Tool) assessments on every youth who enters their system, allowing the Department to determine what is each youth's level of risk to reoffend. According to Sean Hosman, a Conference co-presenter and CEO of Assessments.com, the technology and consulting company partnering with FL DJJ in their EBP

implementation, "The Risk principle says 'triage out low risk offenders;' the Need principle says 'focus the rehabilitative effort on each youth's own dynamic risk factors;' and the Responsivity principle says 'pay attention to each individual's learning style, abilities, and readiness to change.' Couple that with the right amount and intensity of treatment (dosage), administered with fidelity and quality assurance, and that is what works in juvenile justice today."

That is what the research nationwide shows, and Ms. Lake presented a series of charts that show positive trends for FL DJJ, as well. Last year, 82,629 individual youth were referred to the system. Of those, 25,108 youth received probation services and 6,613 of them were committed to residential services. Both those numbers have been trending down for the past 3 years since introduction of the PACT risk/needs assessment system, and the number of youth diverted from the system has been rising. During that time, DJJ has conducted over half a million PACT pre-screen, full, and re-assessments (the latter at least every six months for every youth on probation.) Roughly two-thirds of the youth assessed have scored low or moderate risk to reoffend. It is the one-third who score moderate-high or high risk upon whom the system now focuses most of its resources.

Included in that higher risk category are the youth who require commitment to residential facilities. According to Terri Buckley, DJJ's Director of Program Development, Division of Residential Services, "These are our youth most in need of positive behavioral change. They score high risk in areas like anti-social attitudes, behaviors, relationships, use of alcohol and drugs, and aggression. But, with the PACT and a new residential version called the R-PACT which provides opportunity to better track behavioral change in residential settings, I believe we are starting to see progress." The R-PACT has only been implemented to-date in seven pilot sites, but early results from one of these sites indicate that application of the risk, need and responsivity principles are having the desired results: youth in that pilot site are increasing their strengths and reducing their risks in the areas of aggression, skills, attitudes and behavior and alcohol and drugs.

Unlike outdated correctional models that depend heavily on imprisonment, sanctions and punishment, approaches which embrace EBP, beginning with empirically validated risk/needs assessments like the PACT, are proving effective and cost-efficient, introducing a stronger rehabilitative emphasis, lower costs and better allocation of limited resources, and helping reduce recidivism in offending juvenile populations.

For a PDF copy of the Workshop presentation, click [here](#).

## **About Assessments.com**

Assessments.com (ADC) is the nation's leading innovator in implementing evidence-based practices (EBP) for the corrections and probation field, providing expertise and the newest generation of validated assessment tools and "smart" technology used today by criminal justice agencies across the country. Through these Web-based tools, agencies are reducing recidivism, rehabilitating juvenile and adult offenders, and saving taxpayer money through improved work processes and increased efficiencies.

ADC is a primary force in addressing many of the critical issues facing our corrections systems related to recidivism, caseloads, overcrowding and costs to taxpayers and communities. Based in Bountiful, Utah, the company was formed in 1998 when it created a public/private partnership with the Washington Association of Juvenile Court Services (WAJCA) and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to change the way the state's justice system worked with juveniles. Today ADC provides validated risk assessment and case management software, staff training and consulting for many of the largest criminal justice agencies in the U.S. to address juvenile and adult offenders.

ADC's on-the-ground experience working with more than 75 criminal justice systems, including many of the largest such as California, Florida, Texas and Washington state, is producing positive outcomes and cost-savings through innovative changes in business rules, more effective assessment and targeted case planning and needs management.

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## **About the PACT**

Demonstrated at the NCJFCJ conference, the PACT tool works to increase public safety through prevention, intervention and treatment services that strengthen families and turn around the lives of troubled youth. Specifically, the PACT works to:

- Determine a youth's level of risk for re-offense as a way to target resources to higher-risk youth.
- Identify risk and protective factors linked to criminal behavior so that rehabilitation can be tailored to address each youth's unique assessment profile.
- Develop a case management approach focused on reducing risk and increasing protective factors.

- Allow managers to determine if targeted factors change as a result of the court's intervention.

An important part of the PACT system is the automated, assessment-driven Youth-Empowered Success (YES) case plan which was developed to assist juvenile probation officers and contracted case managers in utilizing the information gathered through the PACT assessment to establish meaningful behavioral goals and actions in collaboration with the youth and family. Putting research into practice, the purpose is to significantly improve supervision services by implementing youth-specific intervention plans that focus on motivation for change, parental and community support networks, and evidence-based practices as tools to reduce criminogenic needs.

Assessments.com's PACT tool has proven to help Florida agencies refocus time and money on the higher-risk youth population by looking at factors such as criminal history; school; use of free time; employment; relationships; family history; living arrangements; substance abuse; mental health; attitudes and behavior; aggression; and skills.