The Youth Competency Assessment (YCA)
Frequently Asked Questions

What is it?

The Youth Competency Assessment is a strengths-based assessment tool and protocol for professionals working with youth and their families. It was developed for use in juvenile justice settings, but can also be used by professionals in other agencies, such substance abuse treatment providers or community treatment or intervention programs.

Who developed it?

NPC Research, in Portland, Oregon, developed the YCA tool and process through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. NPC Research developed and tested the tool and process in collaboration with three Oregon county juvenile departments.

Why was it developed?

The YCA was developed to address a critical gap in the juvenile justice and adolescent treatment systems. These systems have developed an extensive research base in the areas of youth risks and needs, but had not yet fully incorporated strengths into its assessment and service planning processes. This instrument was not designed to replace existing risk or problem identification tools, but rather to expand, strengthen, and improve the system's capacity to include the positive elements of a youth, the youth's family, peers, and/or community in a well-balanced assessment and service profile.

The tool and protocol help youth meet the following three goals:

A. Support Efforts to Repair Harm and Develop Pro-Social Norms and Values
B. Provide Specific Indicators for Pathways Toward a Healthy Identity
C. Connect Youth to Community, Family, and Peers

Has it been tested?

NPC Research developed the YCA tool and process with the assistance of a national panel of experts in the areas of juvenile justice, restorative justice, adolescent treatment, and psychometrics. Youth were involved in the development of the assessment questions. We also pilot tested the training curriculum, tool, and process in three different communities and engaged a local advisory panel of juvenile justice staff and administrators who consulted with us on every aspect of the project. Focus groups of staff using the tool also provided feedback. Feedback from these various groups of

experts contributed to improvements in the training materials and tool, and development of implementation guidelines for other sites.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected during the pilot test. Videotapes of YCA and traditional interviews were coded by people who were not aware of which interviews were conducted using the YCA. Youth and parents/guardian from both pilot sites and a comparison site were interviewed after their assessments, and their responses compared.

While additional studies need to be conducted to collect and analyze youth-level outcome data and long-term system change data, the tool in its current form has face and content validity and seems to be measuring the constructs of interest.

What are the benefits?

Staff using the tool reported improved rapport with and increased buy-in from youth and their parents/guardians. They reported increased job satisfaction and staff morale. They also reported cases ending more quickly and decreased need for the use of sanctions.

Youth reported increased positive perceptions of the juvenile justice staff, including feeling as though their points of view were taken into account and that what they did wrong was not the focus of their meetings.

The YCA increases strengths-based practice and improves the use of positive non-verbal cues and positive atmosphere of interviews with youth and their families. The purpose of the YCA is to help youth create a positive identity; connect with families, positive peers, and their community; and repair any harm that they have caused by their behaviors.

What do I need to do to use it?

For more information about using the YCA in your agency or system, contact Juliette Mackin at NPC Research, 5100 SW Macadam Ave., Ste. 575, Portland, OR 97239, 503-243-2436 x114, Mackin@npcresearch.com. The tool is available online at http://npcresearch.com/resources/materials.