

Joe Williams:

Hello and welcome. April is Second Chance Month, and we are pleased to bring you this limited series podcast and celebration of Second Chances. My name is Joe Williams and I'm joined by my co-host, Heather Erwin. We are Technical Assistance Consultants for the American Institutes for Research. AIR works in partnership with the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to run the Youth Reentry Training and Technical Assistance Center, which provides support for grantees awarded Federal Second Chance Act funding.

Each week this month, we'll engage in inspiring OJJDP grantee and clients from their program to reflect on different aspects of youth reentry. We hope you come away from these conversations feeling better educated about, and inspired by how youth reentry works and why it's important. In this week's episode of Reflections on Reentry, we are featuring the work of AMI Kids. AMI Kids is a national youth serving organization, empowering young people to discover their life paths and believe success is possible. AMI Kids believes that change can happen, one life, one family, and one community at a time.

For over 55 years, AMI Kids has impacted over 165,000 youth and their families by providing a variety of services designed to help young people discover their true potential. We are joined for our conversation today by Amy Bradshaw Hoppock.

Heather Irwin:

Hello and thank you for joining us for this new episode of Reflections on Reentry. We are happy to be joined today by Amy Bradshaw Hoppock. Amy is the Vice President of Behavioral Health for AMI Kids Incorporated, and we are going to conduct this episode as more of an interview style because Amy has some wonderful things to share about projects that AMI Kids has engaged in, expansion efforts, some policy conversations, and some other wonderful work. Amy, it's so nice to see you. Thank you for joining us.

Amy Bradshaw Hoppock: Thank you for having me.

Heather Irwin:

We'll start out by just asking if you could provide an overview of your role and the work that you do with AMI Kids?

Amy Bradshaw Hoppock: Sure. Thank you. I am the Vice President of Behavioral Health for AMI Kids, and I am happy to report that I've been with the organization for 18 years. AMI Kids is a youth serving organization and we offer a wide range of program and services to youth and families. Our services are in eight states, and they're designed to provide the extra support that youth need to realize their true potential. We offer community-based services such as in-home family therapy, as well as workforce development. We offer alternative education and day treatment programming, and even residential programming, providing juvenile justice and behavioral health supports.

Our services are designed to utilize the research-based AMI Kids personal growth model, which incorporates positive youth development and trauma responsive approaches so that we can effectively enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors for young people to be able to reach their individualized goals. We have an 80% successful completion rate and our program graduates have demonstrated improved social emotional skills, attainment of educational goals, completion of industry recognized certifications, and clear plans for the future.

Joe Williams: Thank you, Amy. AMI Kids is one of the outstanding grantees that I have the privilege of working with as a TA coach, and I'm learning more about the outstanding work that they're doing, and they've even been able to expand their model to different states. Can you tell us about the program that you've expanded in South Carolina using Second Chance Act funding, Amy?

Amy Bradshaw Hoppock: Absolutely, Joe, and we appreciate having you as our TA. You're an awesome coach. AMI Kids developed the family-centric model in 2016, and we developed it in a response to a growing number of families who were requesting services to support their kids who had varied levels of involvement in the juvenile justice system. The AMI Kids family-centric model is a research informed community-based model, and it incorporates family engagement and compliance, so that the prevention and intervention services that we provide to young people have a long-term impact. The family-centric model is designed to reduce antisocial behaviors and also improve psychosocial functioning of youth, as well as improve family functioning.

It's a skills training program and it's provided with all family members present in the home by our trained family support specialists on a weekly basis. Families in the model progress through three stages to complete the model, and the stages include stage one, family bonding and assessment, stage two, family development, and stage three family preservation.

Heather Irwin: That's fantastic. Thank you for sharing that, Amy. You mentioned that the family-centric model is research informed and that you were able to demonstrate measurable outcomes. How did AMI Kids do this?

Amy Bradshaw Hoppock: So that was very exciting and a long undertaking. Through legislative appropriation, AMI Kids was able to gain funding that allowed us to conduct controlled clinical trial research to determine whether use of AMI Kids family-centric model improved outcomes for youth who were already engaged in our prevention and intervention programming. Through an external evaluation, youth and families who participated in the AMI Kids family-centric model demonstrated a greater reduction in oppositional defiant behaviors, as well as aggressive and rule-breaking behaviors. And parents who participated in the model reported significant improvement in family communication, behavior control and general family functioning. And these outcomes were when compared with outcomes of youth and families who participated in what we would call treatment-as-usual services.

An additional outcome was that 89% of young people who participated in the model remained crime-free for 12 months following completion of services, which is pretty impressive considering national average of about 45%.

Joe Williams: That's awesome, Amy. That's a great resource that you guys were able to create for yourselves and for the field. Since the initial research and implementation of the AMI Kids family-centric model, how has the model expanded?

Amy Bradshaw Hoppock: We started in Florida, but since the research-based outcomes were determined and we started to gain traction with the model, we have been able to double the accessibility of services across the State of Florida. Through legislative funding, we were also able to expand services to the State of New Mexico through county funding. And then finally, most recently through our Second Chance funding, we're now able to offer the AMI Kids family-centric model to youth and families who are completing our Residential Juvenile Justice Programming throughout this State of South Carolina.

Our family support specialists begin working with youth and families during the transition phase of completing our residential programming, and this is to support a successful discharge and provide direct support in the home following reentry to the community. The AMI Kids family-centric model services are delivered in the home environment until all three stages are complete and a family maintenance plan is developed to ensure families have all supports ready in the community for long-lasting success.

Heather Irwin: It's so wonderful to hear. I appreciate the work that you're doing. You spoke about diversified funding efforts to support the family-centric model. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Amy Bradshaw Hoppock: Sure. I think it's really important for youth serving organizations like ours to work with all levels of stakeholders when they're developing models. And this work will help ensure sustainability so that community needs can be met on a continuous basis. As an AMI Kids national serving organization, we have local and diverse volunteer board members who are phenomenal and they not only ensure that AMI Kids is staying responsive to the local community needs, but also that AMI Kids is able to have strategic discussions with our stakeholders about what funding sources are needed for the service delivery programming that young people and their families are in need of. From local funding to state organizations, to legislative efforts, it's important that all community leaders stay aware of those research informed practices that will effectively empower young people and their families to reach their goals.

Heather Irwin: Absolutely. Yes.

Joe Williams: Thanks for sharing all that with us, Amy. We really appreciate you taking time out of your very busy schedule. We know you're busy out there doing the work with kids in your local area and around the country. We appreciate you working

with us and putting this podcast together so the field can learn more about the great work that you're doing. Any closing thoughts at this time?

Amy Bradshaw Hoppock: I just really appreciate on behalf of AMI Kids, the support that all of our stakeholders in funding give us. Without the support of the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Reentry Second Chance Act grant, we wouldn't be able to carry out our mission-driven work that provides effective reentry services to families throughout the State of South Carolina.

We believe that every young person and family has the power to discover their true potential, and we want to foster that growth through our research-based practices, including the AMI Kids personal growth model, as well as the AMI Kids family-centric model. We just can't thank you enough for the support that you provide and the space that you provide to do that mission-driven work for kids and families.

Heather Irwin: Well, thank you so much. The ideas have to come from somewhere, so it's a good partnership. And again, we appreciate you being here today, and thank you so much for all of the wonderful work that you do to support young people and expanding that work across the country.

Joe Williams: Thank you for joining us during this Second Chance Month to talk about youth reentry. We'd also like to sincerely thank our guests for sharing their insights and experiences with us today and for the wonderful work they continue to do. We hope you join us for the remaining podcast in this series. Follow these links if you'd like more information on the Second Chance Act and programs funded by the Second Chance Act, and for more history and background on Second Chance Month, AIR, and how the Department of Justice enables important work supporting reentry success. We'll see you next time.