



Public Safety Institute
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Executive Summary

Evaluation of the SWITCH Youth Program

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2023, the Memphis Police Department received funding from the Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs for efforts to prevent and reduce violent crime. In turn, the City of Memphis entered a grant agreement with Youth Villages to fund the Memphis Allies/Youth Villages SWITCH Youth program. (SWITCH stands for Support with Intention to Create Hope.) Youth Villages entered a subrecipient agreement with the University of Memphis for the Public Safety Institute to conduct an initial evaluation of SWITCH Youth.

I thank Dr. Minhae Cho and her research team for a very thorough initial evaluation of SWITCH Youth. The evaluation shows promising results for participants in the program, including a significant reduction in total delinquency charges facing those participants during their time in the program. The evaluation reflects a committed SWITCH Youth staff which sees the program as very promising while still evolving. Staff openness was very helpful in identifying specific recommendations for improvement moving forward.

Part of the local Safe Community Action Plan is to develop a system of intensive supervision and appropriate treatment for serious youthful offenders, with cognitive behavioral therapy being a critical part of that. The SWITCH Youth program is key to implementing this part of the plan. Hopefully, the evaluation will serve as a roadmap to build upon the good work that SWITCH Youth is already doing.

This Executive Summary gives an overview of the evaluation. To review the entire evaluation, go to <https://memphis.edu/psi/research>.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bill Gibbons'.

Bill Gibbons, Executive Director
Public Safety Institute

Executive Summary

The Support With Intention To Create Hope (SWITCH) Youth program is a targeted, trauma-informed initiative aimed at reducing youth gun violence in Memphis and Shelby County by engaging and supporting youth at the highest risk for violent involvement. A program evaluation of SWITCH Youth was conducted for youth participating in the program from January 1, 2024 through December 31, 2024, to assess the strengths and areas for improvement in the program's implementation during its early stage.

A concurrent mixed methods design was employed to evaluate the SWITCH Youth program, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the implementation process. The evaluation aimed to assess implementation quality, interprofessional collaboration, and youth behavioral outcomes, with qualitative findings. The qualitative component, prioritized in this early phase, involved ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews with twenty-one staff members, capturing insights into interprofessional collaboration and implementation experiences. The quantitative part included staff surveys using the AITCS-II to assess the level of interprofessional collaboration, and youth data to track changes in behavior, with both sources helping to strengthen the accuracy and depth of the findings through triangulation. The Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) guided the qualitative analysis, while fixed-effects regression and descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative changes in youth behavior and team collaboration.

Qualitative interviews with twenty-one SWITCH Youth staff members identified key facilitators and barriers to program implementation across the five CFIR domains. Overall, staff described SWITCH Youth as a promising yet evolving program. The strengths of the SWITCH Youth program included the program's evidence-based design, adaptive leadership, strong outreach efforts, engagement strategies, staff with lived experience, and interprofessional collaboration. The challenges encountered during program implementation highlighted the cultural mismatch of standardized tools, limited early identification of high-risk youth, lack of follow-up after the intervention, inadequate policy supports, and emotional strain from

caregiver mistrust and boundary-setting difficulties. Staff emphasized the importance of sustaining relational approaches and improving organizational and systemic structures to support the program's ongoing development and success. The promising components of the SWITCH Youth program were corroborated by findings that revealed a strong collaborative foundation. Results from the AITCS-II measure showed high scores across the domains of partnership ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.53$), cooperation ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.56$), and coordination ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.60$), while also identifying areas for improvement such as role flexibility, service integration, and consistent communication to strengthen team effectiveness.

The evaluation of the SWITCH Youth program analyzed data from 186 participants over a one-year period, from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024, to assess changes in youth offense charges before and during program involvement. Using fixed-effects regression, the analysis revealed a significant reduction in total charges during the program, with no significant effect of length of program participation. Significant decreases were also found across specific offense categories, including violent, weapon-related, probation violations, theft, possession-related, and other offenses. These findings suggest the program may be effective in reducing youth involvement in criminal activity during participation.

Based on the evaluation findings, recommendations for improving the SWITCH Youth program and its outcome evaluation are presented using the CFIR domains as a guiding framework:

- 1) **Innovation Characteristics:** To enhance the unique features of the SWITCH Youth program, it is recommended that evidence-based models be culturally adapted to better align with the lived experiences of Memphis youth. This includes integrating creative and culturally resonant strategies that reflect the identities and realities of the Memphis communities. Additionally, the program should leverage youth's strong digital presence and rich cultural identity as tools for engagement and trust-building. Strengthening the program's interdisciplinary model is also essential, which can be achieved by formalizing collaborative team practices and investing in cross-disciplinary training to ensure that all staff members are equipped to work cohesively across roles.

- 2) **Inner Setting:** To improve structural readiness, the SWITCH Youth program should establish clearer role definitions, standardized workflows, and formal decision-making tools to support consistent and timely responses to complex youth needs. Enhancing staff wellness is also critical and can be achieved through regular reflective supervision, routine burnout screening, and more flexible scheduling to reduce emotional fatigue. Furthermore, the program should invest in role-specific training and implement incentive strategies to promote staff retention, boost morale, and support long-term sustainability.
- 3) **Outer Setting:** To enhance the program's responsiveness to external factors that influence implementation, the SWITCH Youth program should expand its community-based referral pathways by partnering with schools, grassroots organizations, and trusted community figures to support earlier identification of high-risk youth. Additionally, establishing formal post-program follow-up services is essential to ensure continued support and sustained outcomes. This effort should be complemented by the development of integrated data systems that enable long-term tracking across service sectors. Finally, the program should advocate for broader policy supports, including youth stipends to reinforce engagement, trauma-informed job readiness programs, access to stable housing, and firearm safety education to address the systemic barriers faced by participating youth.
- 4) **Characteristics of Individuals:** To empower both staff and youth through personalized and inclusive approaches, the SWITCH Youth program should deepen its investment in staff with lived experience by providing structured training, mentorship, and clearly defined professional development pathways to enhance their effectiveness and long-term commitment. Staff have put significant effort into developing their own strategies to engage youth, often tailoring their approaches based on each youth's unique interests, communication preferences, and relational dynamics. To further support and formalize these efforts, the program should implement individualized engagement plans that guide staff in building consistent, meaningful, and youth-centered relationships. Additionally, it is essential to integrate gender-responsive strategies to ensure equitable support and address the distinct experiences and risks faced by girls in the program.

- 5) **Implementation Process:** To improve the efficiency, sustainability, and ethical clarity in program delivery, first, documentation requirements should be streamlined by eliminating redundancies and redesigning workflows with input from frontline staff to reduce administrative burden and free up time for direct youth engagement. Next, to ensure service continuity during staff turnover, structured transition protocols, such as joint handoffs and shared communication strategies, should be implemented. Additionally, the outreach component should be strengthened as a distinct pre-enrollment phase with clearly defined objectives and success measures to guide early engagement efforts. Lastly, staff should receive ongoing ethical guidance and training to help them navigate dual roles, safeguard youth confidentiality, and reduce the emotional burden associated with documentation in sensitive contexts.

Following this formative evaluation, several actions are recommended to guide the next outcome evaluation, providing a more comprehensive and meaningful assessment of the SWITCH Youth program's long-term impact. First, data collection should be expanded to include post-program and follow-up measures that capture sustained progress in youth outcomes over time. Outcome indicators identified by staff, such as school attendance, job readiness and retention, and recidivism, should be prioritized to ensure alignment with the program's goals and on-the-ground insights. More importantly, to enhance the evaluation's relevance and responsiveness, youth and caregiver voices should be centered through participatory methods like surveys, interviews, and storytelling. Additionally, the development of integrated, cross-system data-sharing frameworks will allow for better tracking of youth trajectories across education, child welfare, and justice systems. Finally, securing sustainable funding is essential to support a rigorous outcome evaluation and to maintain the SWITCH Youth program's intensive, relationship-based model of intervention.

To read the full evaluation go to <https://www.memphis.edu/psi/research/pdfs/switch-youth-eval.pdf>.



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