



ALTERNATIVES TO THE SCARED STRAIGHT PROGRAM

Program Background

The first “Scared Straight” program (originally named Juvenile Awareness Program) was the creation of a group of men serving life terms at the Rahway State Prison in New Jersey in the mid 1970’s. The program came to the attention of the media and a television documentary was produced. Perhaps because the original program title lacked “pizzazz” the documentary was entitled “Scared Straight.” The program seemed almost too good to be true in terms of the potential benefit to divert juveniles from a life of crime and appealed to our intuitive sense that young people could be “scared” out of committing delinquent acts.

In-Effectiveness

Over the years “Scared Straight” programs (with variations) cropped up throughout the country. With the growth of these programs, it became possible for researchers to conduct rigorous evaluations of a number of these. The results of these evaluations are now a matter of public record and the general conclusions have been revealing; namely that ‘scared straight’ programs are not only largely ineffective in deterring future law violating behavior but these programs may in some way promote the very behavior that our society is trying to discourage. As a result, it is the position of the U.S. Department of Justice that the use of “Scared Straight” type programs should be avoided.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What’s the difference between a “Jail Tour” and “Scared Straight” programs?

In some cases, it can be assumed that a ‘Jail Tour’ is equivalent to participating in the ‘Scared Straight’ program. However, the purpose of a jail tour is to allow any person requesting a visit to view the facility. During the tour, the groups are not held as inmates and the jail staff is there for protection while entering the facility. In contrast, the scared straight program consists of at-risk youth being held temporarily to demonstrate a day in life as an inmate. While in temporary custody, the juveniles are in prison uniform and have direct contact with real inmates. The inmates are allowed to be aggressive with a “in-your-face” approach as an attempt to rehabilitate juveniles. This approach has actually been shown to cause harm both in the long- and short-term and increases the likelihood of recidivism among some of the youth.

2. Is “Scared Straight” still ineffective/bad if the youth have positive interactions with inmates and encourage them to “change their ways before it is too late?”

During the A&E television show titled “Beyond Scared Straight”, the program concludes with inmates giving a positive one-on-one counseling session with at-risk youth. Even with considering the positive interactions between inmates and the youth being shown, there has still been blatant evidence confirming that “Scared Straight” programs are ineffective. According to the National Institute of Justice [“Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn’t, What’s Promising”](#) report, “Scared Straight” programs was placed in the “what does not work” category. (This information

can be found in Chapter 9 of the report under 3.2 Shock Probation, Shock Parole, and Split Sentences)

3. Where can I find data more information why this program is ineffective?

For more information, visit the following sites:

- Coalition for Juvenile Justice ([Scared Straight: Don't Believe the Hype](#))
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention ([OJJDP News at a Glance](#))
- Cochrane Collaboration ([Scared Straight Review](#))
- Campbell Collaboration ([A Systematic Review](#))
- Campbell Collaboration ([Scared Straight Programs Results](#))

Relevant Federal Law: JJDPa 2002 Section 223(a)(12). JJDPa 2002 Section 223(a)(13)
(<http://www.ojjdp.gov/about/jjdp2002titlev.pdf>)

Relevant Georgia Law: O.C.G.A. 15-11-415 (b); O.C.G.A. 15-11-503
(<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/gacode/>)

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Evidence Based Programs

An “evidence-based program” (EBP) is a method that has been scientifically proven to work. In order to be considered an EBP, the program must be effective and can be implemented as such. Evidence-based programs are known to be more effective than “Scared Straight” program. According to the [Washington State Institute for Public Policy](#), Functional Family Therapy, an EBP, reduce crime rates by eighteen (18) percent in 2007. In contrast, according to a study done in 2000 by Anthony Petrosino and researchers from the [Campbell Collaboration](#), “Scared Straight” programs increase crime rates up to twenty-eight (28) percent. As shown, control approaches like Scared Straight do not work; therapeutic approaches do. For more information on EBP, visit the following site: Washington State Institute for Public Policy (<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/986>)

Community Resource Database

The Department of Juvenile Justice has a compiled list of evidence–based programs and services for youth and their families. With more than 1,000 resources listed, youth and their families can access the community listing at any time ([Resources Listing](#)). In addition, Georgia offers various mentoring programs that aims to redirect at-risk youth, you can also access these programs through the above resource listing.

For further information, please contact:

Joseph Lynn

Juvenile Detention Compliance Monitor

Joseph.Lynn@cjcc.ga.gov