

41st Annual InterCourt Conference



Session 2B:
10 Core Principles of
Juvenile Probation

March 13, 2025
1:15 p.m.—2:45 p.m.

Hilton Columbus at
Easton Town Center
Columbus, OH

FACULTY BIOGRAPHIES

TRAVIS JOHNSON is a grants program analyst with the American Probation and Parole Association. His work focuses on juvenile probation alongside the Annie E. Casey Foundation. He has worked for the American Probation and Parole Association for 8 years. Travis, over his tenure at APPA, has conducted surveys to the field on workforce issues, drug-testing, and fines and fees. His work also involves conducting workload studies for supervision agencies.

Travis attended the University of Kentucky, majoring in Political Science with a minor in Arabic and Islamic Studies. He then continued his education at Eastern Kentucky University, where he obtained his master's degree in safety, Security, and Emergency Management. His love for the justice system drove him to work for APPA.

OPAL WEST is a senior associate with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. As part of the Foundation's Juvenile Justice Strategy Group, her work focuses on youth probation, the disposition most often imposed on young people who enter our nation's juvenile justice system. West is helping to transform youth probation nationally into a focused intervention that promotes personal growth and long-term success for youth who pose significant risks for serious offending. She also guides juvenile justice agencies to treat families as partners.

West began her career as a juvenile probation and parole officer in Louisiana. Working for state government there, she led efforts to improve conditions of confinement in detention centers across the state. She also led statewide expansion efforts for the JDAI® approach to building a better and more equitable youth justice system. She was appointed to serve on a task force to develop standards of care for state-run secure facilities and local detention centers. West is a graduate of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

10 Core Principles of Juvenile Probation

Travis Johnson


*APPA Grant and Research Associate
Council of State Governments Justice Center*

Opal West



*Senior Associate
The Annie E. Casey Foundation*





 AMERICAN PROBATION AND PAROLE ASSOCIATION

Tell us who you are!!!



Letter to a Child You Love

Dear _____,

Welcome to the world. I hope that you grow up to be _____.

I want you to experience _____ and to always
_____.

I know that you will learn to _____ and will also _____.

My greatest hope for you is that _____.

I also want you to _____ and to _____.

Love,

The BEST Initiative, 2011.



The 10 Core Principles of Juvenile Probation

- 1 Center youth and families to individualize probation.
- 2 Promote equity regarding race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status.
- 3 Align practice with research on adolescent development.
- 4 Minimize conditions of probation.
- 5 Minimize confinement.
- 6 Look to encourage success, not punish failure.
- 7 Be a bridge to opportunity and connection in the community.
- 8 Be a coach, teacher, mentor, and advocate – not a compliance monitor.
- 9 Aim for progress, not perfection.
- 10 Hold probation accountable for meaningful results.



Principle 1

1. Center youth and families to individualize probation.

The probation experience must begin with a meaningful discussion between the probation officer, the young person, and their family/support team to establish the expectations for supervision. These conversations should lead to a success plan that reflects not only the findings of a risk-need assessment or a preset list of probation-sponsored programs and services, but also a unique set of goals and activities calibrated to maximize the young person's growth and success.

Core Elements of the Case Planning Model

- **Stage One: Productive Starts**
 - Relationship focused, explanation of the process, identifying aspirations, finding a common ground goal, prioritizing what's needed (safety plans)
- **Stage Two: Deeper Exploration of Needs and Opportunities**
 - Exploring the case from multiple angles, broadening and deepening the alliance with family members, selecting four areas for the probation case plan
- **Stage Three: Creating the Plan**
 - Smart goals, shared responsibility, clarity on rules, incentives, consequences, and expectations



Principle 2

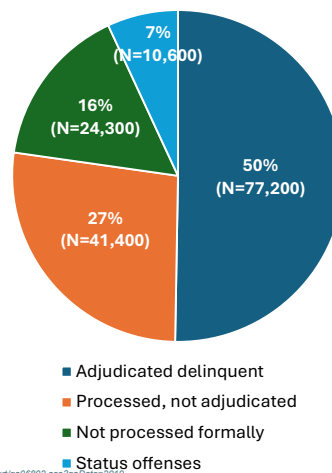
2. Promote equity regarding race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status.

Probation has an obligation to promote equity for youth of color – and for girls, LGBTQ youth, youth with disabilities, and youth and families who are not native English speakers – and to ensure that every young person is treated equitably, no matter where they live or the resources available in their community.

Why Transform Juvenile Probation?

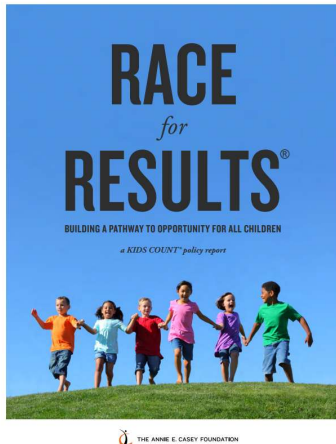
- **Most common disposition in youth justice:** More than a quarter million young people per year are placed on probation.
- **Gateway to out-of-home placement:** Nearly 20% of youth in placement are there for breaking probation rules, not breaking the law.
- **Perpetuates disparities:** 65% of all youth in placement for technical violations are youth of color, far more than their share of the youth population.
- **Doesn't work:** Focus on compliance, risk and deficits lags behind knowledge of youth development, which calls for support, opportunity and connection.

Figure 2: Total Youth Placed on Some Form of Probation in 2021



Source for graph: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics. <https://www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/eazacs/>. Source for last bullet: <https://www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/cpa06802.asp?paLcvt=3713>

Index Indicators and State Scores



Race for Results Index Indicators (Percentages)

Year	Target	Actual
2022	85.5	84.9
2017-21	86	84

Race for Results Index Scores (2024)

Location	Black	Latino	White	Year of Birth Score
United States	482	570	689	652
Alabama	493	578	679	651
Alaska	537	629	761	687
Arizona	591	700	838	712
Arkansas	488	589	699	667
California	532	701	835	712
Colorado	595	749	902	784
Connecticut	612	765	918	812
Delaware	618	773	925	820
District of Columbia	640	792	938	827
Florida	540	638	752	697
Georgia	548	638	752	697
Hawaii	612	765	918	812
Idaho	612	765	918	812
Illinois	612	765	918	812
Indiana	595	749	902	784
Iowa	612	765	918	812
Kansas	595	749	902	784
Kentucky	595	749	902	784
Louisiana	595	749	902	784
Maine	612	765	918	812
Maryland	612	765	918	812
Massachusetts	612	765	918	812
Michigan	612	765	918	812
Minnesota	612	765	918	812
Mississippi	488	589	699	667
Missouri	612	765	918	812
Montana	612	765	918	812
Nebraska	612	765	918	812
Nevada	612	765	918	812
New Hampshire	612	765	918	812
New Jersey	612	765	918	812
New Mexico	612	765	918	812
New York	612	765	918	812
North Carolina	612	765	918	812
North Dakota	612	765	918	812
Ohio	612	765	918	812
Oklahoma	612	765	918	812
Oregon	612	765	918	812
Pennsylvania	612	765	918	812
Rhode Island	612	765	918	812
South Carolina	612	765	918	812
South Dakota	612	765	918	812
Tennessee	612	765	918	812
Texas	612	765	918	812
Utah	612	765	918	812
Vermont	612	765	918	812
Virginia	612	765	918	812
Washington	612	765	918	812
West Virginia	612	765	918	812
Wisconsin	612	765	918	812
Wyoming	612	765	918	812



Principle 3

3. Align practice with research on adolescent development.

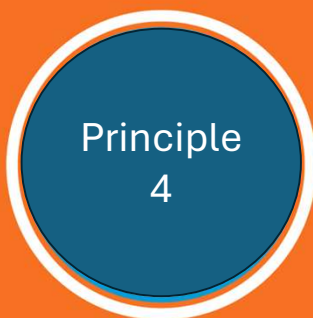
Adolescent development and brain research make clear that this period of life is unique and critically important to youth development. It is a time of exploring identities, pushing boundaries, and testing authority. By nature, adolescents are prone to risk-taking and sensation-seeking and are more influenced by peers than adults. As a result, adolescents are more inclined to rule-breaking than adults, but they are also very likely to grow out of such behaviors on their own. Juvenile probation and the juvenile justice system generally must be guided by this research and, particularly, by the understanding that youth require agency and legitimate pathways forward to be successful.

Aligning Practices with Adolescent Brain Development

BEHAVIORS	POSSIBLE POINTS	OPPORTUNITY PRIZES AND RECOGNITIONS		
		POINTS	PRIZES	COURT RECOGNITION
Complete community service hours	x 10			
Pass random urinalysis	2	5 points	Bus tickets (5) Bag of chips Nail polish Keychain lanyard Restaurant gift card (\$5)	Keep up the good work!
Complete restitution	x 10			
Complete letter of apology	x 5	21 points	Restaurant gift card (\$15) \$15 ORCA card \$15 Tacoma mall gift card Movie tickets (2)	Congratulations letter from probation
Complete weekly responsibility goal	x 1 - 3	42 points	2 Rainiers vouchers Earbuds 2 Museum of Glass passes 2 Ice skating rink passes	Community Opportunity!
Complete weekly probation commitment goal	x 1 - 4			Congratulations letter from judge
		Completion of court conditions and probation plan		Graduation ceremony (reduced probation time)



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Principle 4

4. Minimize conditions of probation.

Probation should set goals to help youth improve their behavior over time and reduce the frequency and seriousness of problematic behaviors, rather than setting hard and fast rules and demanding immediate compliance through traditional conditions of supervision. Requiring youth on probation to follow long lists of rules and conditions, or to comply perfectly with any rule, flies in the face of adolescent development research and should be abandoned as a probation practice. Because adolescents have difficulty controlling impulses, resisting peer pressure, weighing consequences, and exercising good judgement, mistakes and lapses must be expected.



Principle 5

5. Minimize confinement.

Probation should seek to minimize the use of confinement and should remove young people from their homes only when they pose an immediate risk to the health and safety of others, and then only for the shortest period possible. Research shows that removing youth from their homes and placing them in facilities causes lasting damage, including heightening dropout rates, reducing college enrollment as well as future employment and income, harming physical and mental health, and greatly increasing future involvement with the justice system.

The Dangers of Detention

- Detention may increase recidivism
- Holding groups of delinquent youth in congregate settings negatively affect their behavior and increases reoffending
- Detention pulls youth deeper into the juvenile and criminal justice system
- Alternatives to detention are more effective in reducing crime and recidivism
- Detention may interfere with the process of “aging out” of delinquency
- There is little relationship between detention and over all crime in the community

Barry Holman and Jason Ziedenberg, *The Dangers of Detention*, Justice Policy Institute (2006)



Principle
6

6. Look to encourage success, not punish failure.

Juvenile probation is most effective when it focuses more on support than punishment, more on assistance than control, and more on motivating positive behavior change through rewards, incentives, and encouragement rather than trying to deter delinquent behavior through threats, punishments, and, ultimately, confinement. Although public safety will always remain a core concern of probation, probation personnel must recognize that the only effective route to public safety is through positive behavior change. Therefore, probation must be guided by the evidence regarding what works to foster personal growth and behavior change and must refrain from taking punitive steps in the name of public safety that research indicates are ineffective in changing adolescent behavior.

The Power of Aspirations





Principle
7

7. Be a bridge to opportunity and connection in the community.

Probation should work in close partnership with families and communities and must recognize that a key part of its role is connecting youth with organizations and resources that can benefit the young person now and in the future. Probation officers, who can and often do play a pivotal positive role in young people's lives, must recognize that they are only involved with youth for a short period and that parents and families remain the most important people in young people's lives.

Partnership
Requires
Flexibility

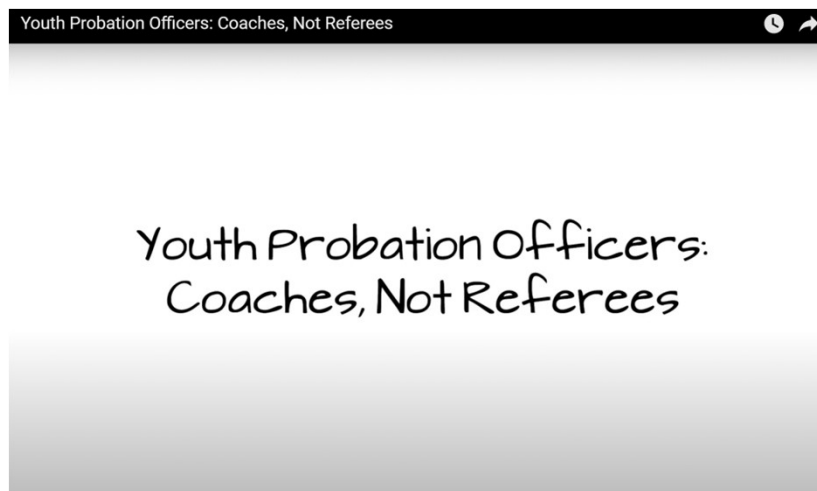
- **Time:** being available outside of traditional office hours and on weekends
- **Funding:** having funding mechanisms and contracts that can shift with community and youth needs
- **Hiring:** providing opportunities for people with lived and shared experiences to support youth on probation
- **Compensation:** budget to acknowledge the time, energy and contributions of community members, youth and families
- **Programming:** encourage and support innovations, particularly those focused on youth at highest risk



Principle
8

8. Be a coach, teacher, mentor, and advocate – not a compliance monitor.

Probation is most effective when officers build warm, empathetic, trusting relationships with youth and employ core correctional practices to help young people learn to set realistic goals, recognize negative behavior patterns, identify individual-level and system-level barriers, build self-awareness, learn problem-solving skills, and access resources in the community. Focusing on compliance with rules undercuts these priorities and undermines probation's effectiveness.





Principle 9

9. Aim for progress, not perfection.

Probation experiences should last only as long as necessary to stabilize the young person's behavior and set them on a course for future success. Achieving a limited number of top goals to address factors that led to delinquent conduct and connecting young people with relevant services and positive youth development activities should be the primary focus. Probation cannot solve all the challenges young people face before releasing them from supervision



Principle 10

10. Hold probation accountable for meaningful results.

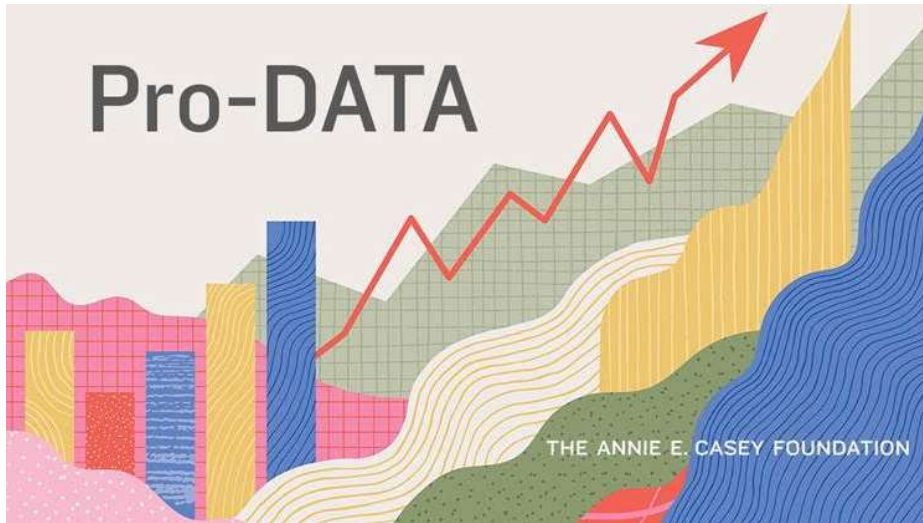
Probation creates the context in which youth can change and provide the opportunities for them to take the first steps to success. It is our responsibility to ensure that our probation departments, as well as our communities, are providing the most effective opportunities for young people to be successful. Probation agencies must set goals, monitor progress, report young people's achievement of critical milestones, and find ways to measure their impact on the lives of youth. To do this, probation must solicit and incorporate feedback from the youth and families the department serves to ensure that probation is meeting their needs and supporting their success.



How is your agency doing?



Pro-DATA



What is Pro-Data?

A tool designed to fuel probation transformation by collecting, organizing and visualizing data, making it accessible to leaders, staff and community partners. It has three components:

- A custom-built application to collect youth justice data on up to 200 measures.
- A data dashboard offering multiple ways to analyze data and visualize data within a jurisdiction and in relation to other sites.
- A survey dashboard specifically for probation leadership in jurisdictions that participate in the Probation Practice survey.

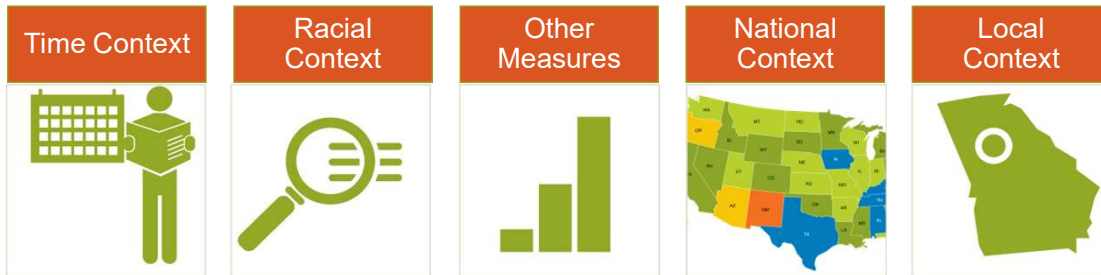
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Why is the development of Pro-Data significant?

1. Secure database with web-based data entry
2. Capacity for any jurisdiction to add custom measures that reflect local priorities
3. User-friendly data dashboard that generates visuals that can be shared, copied into presentations or used in live meetings.
4. Linked to census data, enabling site-to-site comparisons
5. Privacy protections

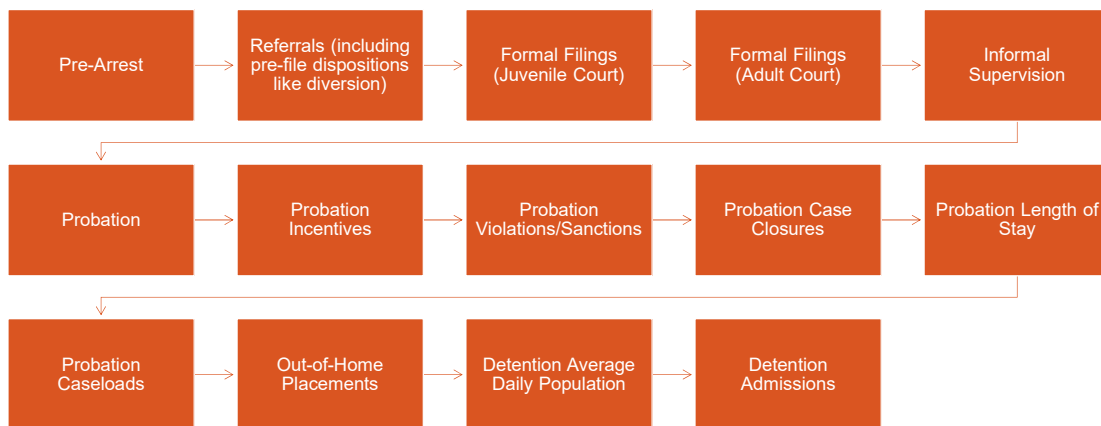
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Makes data accessible, brings it to life and puts it in context



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What kinds of data measures are included?



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THE 10 CORE PRINCIPLES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Directions: To what extent does current practice at your site align with each principle? Consider not just your own practice and perspective but how young people and families in your community might view your system as a whole. Make an x on the scale to indicate alignment.

Center Youth and Families to Individualize Probation. The probation experience must begin with meaningful give and take between the probation officer, the young person, and their family/support team to establish the expectations for supervision. These conversations should lead to a success plan that reflects not just the findings of a risk-need assessment or a preset list of probation-sponsored programs and services, but a unique set of goals and activities calibrated to maximize the young person’s growth and success.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Promote equity with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability status. Probation has an obligation to promote equity for youth of color – and for LGBTQ youth, girls, youth with disabilities, and youth (and families) who are not native English-speakers – and to make sure that every young person is treated equitably no matter where they live and the resources available in their community.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Align With Research on Adolescent Development. Adolescent development and brain research makes clear that adolescence is a unique and critically important developmental period in life, a time of exploring identities, pushing boundaries, and testing authority. By nature, adolescents are more prone toward risk-taking and sensation-seeking than adults, and more influenced by peers. As a result, they are more prone to rule-breaking than adults, but also very likely to grow out of those behaviors on their own. Juvenile probation and the juvenile justice system generally must be guided by this research, and particularly by the understanding that youth require agency and legitimate pathways forward to be successful.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Minimize Conditions of Probation. Probation should set goals to help youth improve their behavior over time, reduce the frequency and seriousness of problematic behaviors, rather than setting hard and fast rules and demanding immediate compliance through traditional conditions of supervision. Requiring youth on probation to follow long lists of rules and conditions, or to comply perfectly with any rule, flies in the face of adolescent development research and should be abandoned as a probation practice. By their nature, adolescents have difficulty controlling impulses, resisting peer pressure, weighing consequences and exercising good judgement. Mistakes and lapses must be expected.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Minimize Confinement (and Recognize that Public Safety Comes Only Through Behavior Change). Probation should seek to minimize the use of confinement and should remove youth from their homes only when they pose immediate risk to the health and safety of others, and only for the shortest period possible. Overwhelming research shows that removing youth from their homes and placing them in facilities causes lasting damage – heightening dropout rates, reducing college enrollment as well as future employment and income, damaging their physical and mental health, and greatly increasing their future justice involvement.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Look to Encourage Success, Not Punish Failure. Juvenile probation is most effective when it focuses more on support than punishment; more on assistance than control; and more on motivating positive behavior change through rewards, incentives, and encouragement than on trying to deter delinquent behavior through threats, punishments, and ultimately confinement. While public safety will always remain a core concern of probation, probation personnel must recognize that the only effective route to public safety is through positive behavior change. Therefore, probation must be guided by the evidence regarding what works to foster personal growth and behavior change, and it must refrain from taking punitive steps in the name of public safety that research indicates are inconsistent with success.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Be a Bridge to Opportunity and Connection in the Community. Probation should work in close partnership with families and communities and must recognize that a key part of their role is to connect youth with community organizations and resources that can benefit the young person into the future. Probation officers can and often do play a pivotal positive role in young people's lives. However, POs must recognize that they are only involved in young people's lives for a short period, and that ultimately parents and families remain the most important people in young people's lives.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Be a Coach, Teacher, Mentor, and Advocate -- Not a Compliance Monitor. Probation is most effective when officers build warm, empathetic, trusting relationships with youth and employ core correctional practices to help young people learn to set realistic goals, recognize negative behavior patterns, identify responsivity factors, build self-awareness, learn problem-solving skills, and access available resources in the community. Focusing on rule-compliance undercuts these priorities and undermines probation's effectiveness.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Aim for Progress, Not Perfection. Probation experiences should last only as long as necessary to stabilize the young person's behavior and set them on a course for future success. Achieving a limited number of top goals that address needs that led to their delinquent conduct and connecting them to relevant supports and positive youth development activities in the community should be the primary focus. Probation cannot solve all of a young person's challenges before releasing them off supervision.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment

Hold Probation Accountable for Meaningful Results. We have a part to play in a youth's success while on supervision. We create the context in which a youth can change and provide the opportunities for them to take those first steps. It is our responsibility to ensure that our probation departments, as well as our communities, are providing the most effective opportunities for young people to be successful. If the youth fails to succeed, we fail to succeed.

Limited/Low Alignment -----> Some Alignment-----> High Alignment



NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES: COMMITTING TO PRACTICE CHANGE

REFLECT: Take a moment to consider your reflections to the 10 core principles.

COMMIT: Make at least one commitment to better align with the 10 core principles. Consider:

- What can you do yourself that's within your sphere of influence?
- What your organization or department needs to do?

