



## Youth Firesetters Need a Multidisciplinary Approach to Intervention

By Jerrod Brown

Youth firesetters sometimes present with a wide array of mental illnesses (e.g., mood and anxiety disorders), behavioral disorders (e.g., ADHD and conduct disorder), learning disorders, and less-than-optimal environmental conditions (e.g. caregiver instability and dysfunctional family dynamics). Many of these co-occurring conditions are characterized by cognitive (e.g., executive functioning and memory), social (e.g., verbal and nonverbal communication), and adaptive (e.g., problem solving and decision making) functioning impairments. Because the prevalence rates of these conditions are often disproportionately higher in youth firesetters relative to the general population, youth firesetters stand to benefit from accurate assessment, appropriate treatment and intervention, and other supports and services. Nonetheless, traditional fire education and behavioral modification interventions may not be as effective in youth firesetters with these co-occurring conditions as in youth firesetters without co-occurring conditions. As such, fire professionals should seek out multidisciplinary teams to adequately address the needs of youth firesetters with co-occurring conditions.

Multidisciplinary teams should incorporate the unique skills and strengths of the fire service, law enforcement, mental health specialists, and other relevant professionals. First, the fire service typically focuses on enhancing community safety via fire education and intervention programs. Second, law enforcement usually handles the criminal processes like investigation and arrest, which can contribute to the referral of youth firesetters to different intervention programs. Third, mental health professionals can bring several skills to the table, particularly in the areas of assessment and treatment. Fourth, other notable members of a youth's support network such as educators, probation officers, and social workers should be incorporated whenever possible. Together, the coordinated efforts of such a multidisciplinary

team can play an integral role in maximizing the effectiveness of an intervention by ensuring there are no gaps in the youth's care.

In addition to advocating on behalf of multidisciplinary teams and creating them, fire professionals would benefit from receiving cross-training in other disciplines. For example, advanced education and training in the area of mental health would be very beneficial. Such training could cover basic screening considerations, intervention approaches that are most appropriate for youth with various mental health-related conditions, or just simply a better understanding of the causes and symptoms of different mental illnesses. This refined knowledge base has the potential to assist fire professionals in recognizing youth firesetters with co-occurring conditions and increases the likelihood of referrals to appropriate service providers. When the proper treatment and services are received, the odds of future firesetting behaviors are decreased and public safety is improved.

## Biography

**Jerrod Brown, Ph.D.**, is the Treatment Director for Pathways Counseling Center, Inc. Pathways provides programs and services benefiting individuals impacted by mental illness and addictions. Jerrod is also the founder and CEO of the American Institute for the Advancement of Forensic Studies (AIAFS), and the Editor-in-Chief of Forensic Scholars Today (FST) and the Journal of Special Populations (JSP). Jerrod has completed four separate master's degree programs and holds graduate certificates in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Other Health Disabilities (OHD), and Traumatic-Brain Injuries (TBI). Jerrod is certified as a Youth Firesetter Prevention/Intervention Specialist, Thinking for a Change (T4C) Facilitator, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Trainer, and Problem Gambling Treatment Provider.