



Youth Justice

Implement a re-entry pilot program with wrap-around services focused on family engagement, mentoring, employment and advance exit planning.

WHY

The transition back home after youth have been in custody can be challenging if youth have not had significant time and support to plan and engage with the process.

Many times, they might be returning to peers who have moved on to the next stage of life, whether that be additional educational opportunities or participating in the workforce. Ensuring that youth have a plan of where they will fit in is critical to a successful transition and reducing recidivism.

Engaging a child's family in the therapeutic treatment process throughout detention is critical to a successful youth justice system. Still, it becomes even more imperative as the youth plans to return home to loved ones.

The transition back to their community can be a turning point in whether a child is successfully rehabilitated or not. This moment should be supported with extensive planning, resources, and community support.

A pilot program in Georgia has a successful re-entry planning model:⁹

It starts with developing a reentry plan within 60 days of the youth's detention. A multidisciplinary team—which includes a reentry specialist, juvenile detention counselor, community case manager, and mental health counselor—meets with the youth and family. As the release date nears, the team meets monthly, joined by a reentry resource coordinator who connects the family with local service providers and an education specialist who helps facilitate a return to high school or enrollment in postsecondary school or technical college.

The program has long-standing partnerships with companies to provide employment opportunities to the youth and their caregivers when necessary.

Factors that contribute to the project's success include an emphasis on family engagement. Monthly "family chats" address topics such as financial literacy, nutrition, and substance use, and a 10-week course emphasizes ways to strengthen family communications.

The reentry program has a Reentry Taskforce that improves outcomes by increasing support. The DJJ Reentry Taskforce convenes stakeholders to work together to support jurisdiction-wide reentry policy and practice changes.

Taskforce membership currently consists of more than 70 state agencies and nonprofit organizations. The DJJ Reentry Taskforce is divided into eight Subgroups with DJJ serving as the "backbone" organization: Family and Living Arrangements; Peer Groups and Friends; Behavior and Physical Health (Substance Use); Education and Schooling; Career and Technical Education; Leisure Time, Recreation and Avocational Interests; Parenthood Subgroup; and Underserved Areas Subgroup.