

Youth Justice Council

Hennepin County Juvenile Justice System



For quite some time there has been ongoing discussions and efforts related to increased opportunities to serve youth in their communities avoiding out of home placements, unless absolutely necessary. Approximately a year ago Malaika Eban, with the Legal Rights Center, and Lauren Uhl, with Juvenile Probation, led a workgroup to develop some recommendations that would help us improve goals of increased targeted and effective community supports for youth with complex needs on probation. The workgroup concluded its efforts of developing recommendations and shared the themes from the work with the Youth Justice Council at their June meeting. The report is now ready for your review and is available in this document.

It is important to note that all recommendations will not be implemented immediately. There are some recommendations that will be adopted in the short term, and others that will require planning and alignment with ongoing and future efforts. Listed below is information regarding ongoing efforts that immediately align with some of the recommendations, as well as upcoming next steps for other specific recommendations.

Recommendation: Partnership with housing and therapy providers to provide day treatment, respite care, and/or bed space for youth experiencing crisis or conflict.

- Paid employment or workforce readiness training.
- Provide all youth on probation and their families access to culturally appropriate trauma services and restorative practices that address the root causes of violence and transform community relationships.

Efforts underway in these areas:

- *DOCCR's community productive day program will expand construction programming to youth through a partnership with the Minneapolis Park Board this summer.*
- *Expanded contract in existing community service array with Pathways to Success to offer services to 18–24 yrs. old youth, including work readiness and paid skill development training/internships.*
- *Juvenile Probation has extended ongoing planning efforts with the Youth Restorative Justice Disposition Circle Keeper pilot to keep culturally appropriate and the trauma-informed service center.*

Recommendation: Financially support community-driven ideas, programs, and initiatives for safety and youth violence interruption.

- Pursue the addition of Credible Messengers and/or Transformative Mentorship programming that does not currently exist for youth on Juvenile Probation.
- Provide all youth on probation, and their families, access to culturally appropriate trauma services and restorative practices that address the root causes of violence and transform community relationships.

Efforts underway in these areas:

- *Juvenile Probation has added A Mothers Love and We Push for Peace as credible messengers to the array of services offered through Juvenile Probation.*
- *We will move forward with creating a Request for Proposal (RFP) that encompasses culturally appropriate trauma services, restorative practices that address the root causes of violence and can transform community relationships, ongoing community driven ideas, programs, and initiatives for safety and youth violence interruption.*
- *Work with Health and Human Services (HHS) to strategize on how to eliminate barriers and increase equity as part of the RFP process, and hear from September's public YJC meeting on other ways we might eliminate barriers and increase equity as part of the RFP process.*

Recommendation: Utilize community members as participants in the development and selection of the contracting/RFP process.

Efforts underway in this area:

- *The Alternatives to Placement Committee met with HHS and shared input on strategies to be used in the development of RFPs. Community members will be trained, compensated, and included on the evaluation panel for developed RFPs.*

Recommendation: Develop a holistic family center based upon healing and resources and operated by and for the community, to include:

- Space to address the multiple needs of youth and provide expansive opportunities for their development.

Efforts underway in these areas:

- Expand scope of Youth Connection Center to increase service access points for Youth and Families in Hennepin County.

Thanks to all who contributed to these efforts and particularly Malaika and Lauren for your leadership.

Hennepin County Youth Justice Council

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Alternatives to Out of Home Placement Workgroup- Recommendation Report

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Abstract

Hennepin County Juvenile Probation operates and facilitates an extensive array of community and residential services available to youth from their first entry and diversion to deep-end involvement and residential correctional placements. The information and recommendations in this report seek to expand upon available services to address a specific need for intensive alternative(s) to out of home placement (OOHP). This project is situated within the context of urgent conversations in our country, state, and city about racial disparities and institutionalized racism. Hennepin County has recently declared racism a public health crisis requiring intervention. Disparities in out of home placement rates in Hennepin County indicate a need for critical analysis and the creation of innovative alternative programming for young people.

This project covers an examination of current services, focus groups to solicit input and ideas from youth, families, and community members, and research on best and promising practices. Current trends show the closure of numerous residential treatment programs, including the impending closure of the Hennepin County Youth Residential Treatment Center. Additional resources, ideas, and support are needed to serve youth in the community that may have otherwise been sent to residential facilities. Areas to be targeted include, but are not limited to mental health, trauma and grief, education, employment, housing and financial stability, health and well-being, gun and group violence. Recommendations and strategies to meet the needs of youth, family, and community in order to reduce the need for out of home placement include:

1. Financially support community-driven ideas, programs, and initiatives for safety and youth violence interruption.
2. Pursue the addition of a Credible Messengers and/or Transformative Mentorship programming that does not currently exist for youth on Juvenile Probation.
3. Provide all youth on probation and their families with access to culturally appropriate trauma services and restorative practices that address the root causes of violence and transform community relationships.
4. Develop a holistic family center based upon healing and resources and operated by and for the community, to include:
 - a. Space to address the multiple needs of youth and provide expansive opportunities for their development.
 - b. Partnership with housing and therapy providers to provide day treatment, respite care, and/or bed space for youth experiencing crisis or conflict.
 - c. Include paid employment or workforce readiness training.
5. Utilize community members as participants in the development and selection of the contracting/RFP process.

Background and Overview

For decades, nationwide research has shown the ineffectiveness of residential placement in reducing recidivism and its negative impacts on the well-being of youth and families. In the late 1970s, Paul DeMuro, Commissioner of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Corrections System acknowledged that “the best word to describe America’s addiction to training schools is ‘iatrogenic’ – a cure that makes problems worse.” According to a comprehensive report released by Annie E. Casey Foundation, “juvenile facilities are dangerous, ineffective, unnecessary, obsolete, wasteful, and inadequate.” (The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2011). *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*. Baltimore, MD: Richard A. Mendel.)

In Hennepin County, the overall number of youth in out of home placement has drastically reduced since 2015. 13% of youth on Juvenile Probation were in OOHP on the last day of quarter 4 of 2020, compared to 19% in quarter 4 of 2018 and 21% in quarter 4 of 2016 (Out-of-Home Placement Trends: Q4 2020, 2020). However, current data demonstrates a glaring racial and ethnic disparity in youth placed outside their home for treatment and rehabilitation as part of their probation. On the last day of quarter 4 of 2020, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth made up 90% of youth placed out of home by Hennepin County Juvenile Probation and Juvenile Court (Out-of-Home Placement Trends: Q4 2020, 2020), even though estimates and census data show that people of color made up only 20-26% of Hennepin County’s overall population in 2019 (US Census Bureau, N.D.). As the country continues to engage in dialogue about race, white supremacy, and systems change, and as our county works to prioritize eliminating racial disparities, this is a problem that must be addressed.

The latest data specific to Hennepin County recidivism post-OOHP is from youth exiting placement in 2016. Some of the placement programs utilized then are no longer in service or contracted to serve Hennepin County youth, and others have greatly shifted their programming and services since 2016. In a report using this data, it was acknowledged that, “while youth successfully discharged recidivated at slightly lower rates than those who were unsuccessfully discharged, this difference was not significant. Youth successfully completing an RTC placement were just as likely to recidivate than those who were unsuccessfully discharged.” In fact, they continue, “for the most part, there was no difference in recidivism for those who were successfully or unsuccessfully discharged from RTC placements in 2016” (OHP Recidivism by Program, 2019). Though the data shows that this is not a statistically significant intervention, it is one that continues to be used. The continued use of OOHP is a consequence of the reality that the youth served by Hennepin County Juvenile Probation often present with a significant need for intensive intervention services. Community violence and weapons use among young people is highly visible in Minneapolis and the last year’s challenges with COVID, the murder of George Floyd, and a nationwide increase in homicide rates demonstrate the need for extensive support for youth and families. Hennepin County Juvenile Probation has a responsibility to support community safety as well as positive youth development through the provision of effective interventions and supports that meet the specific needs of youth and their families.

The task of this workgroup and report is to identify youth, family, and community needs for an intensive community-based alternative to out of home placement that will address the county's racial disparities through intentional community partnerships and investment. While the overall number of youth in placement is trending downward, BIPOC male youth continue to be overrepresented in the OOHP population. This report acknowledges the reduction in the use of out of home placement and seeks further reduction of placement to challenge current structures of intervention and return decision-making power to families and communities most affected by delinquency, community violence, and justice system disparities.

The following population(s) are the likely and intended recipients of intensive community-based alternative resources and strategies:

- BIPOC youth at risk of out of home placement or previously placed outside the home by Juvenile Probation or Human Services;
- Youth aged 12-24 years;
- Primarily male-identifying youth, occasional female-identifying youth;
- Residents of Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs;
- Families and neighborhoods of the above-mentioned youth.

Methodology

This project began with a solicitation to county and community agency staff involved in systems change work for their interest in participating in the workgroup. There was a desire to have community voice and involvement in the project early on, however, funds for compensation could not be secured until the late stages of the work. The majority of the project work was completed by systems and community partner agency staff. The work group utilized the following methods to develop recommendations:

- Analysis of current community-based array of services (i.e., CBAS) programming;
- Review of current data and statistics regarding youth sent to OOHP;
- Youth, family, and community focus groups;
- Research into best practice and promising programs;
- Development of a survey for youth and families;
 - As a note, at the time of this report, the survey has just been disseminated to youth and families impacted by OOHP over the last two years (2019 - Present). Results should be available to inform any future RFP process(es).

Current Reform Efforts

Juvenile Justice has long been a platform for reform work. Hennepin County operated as a Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (i.e., JDAI) site for the last two decades, implementing detention reform, increased diversionary practices, and innovative justice system change. The efforts of this initiative were aligned with research suggesting that keeping the family structure intact increases positive outcomes for youth and that “separation from key adults and even friends and romantic partners can hinder normal development and reduce incentives to follow through on conventional goals.” (Laurence Steinberg et al., *Reentry of Young Offenders from The Justice System: A Developmental Perspective*, Youth Violence Juv. Justice (2004). Studies show that connections to positive community resources help young people on their paths towards success.

A 2018 report from The Annie E. Casey Foundation highlights opportunities for jurisdictions to intensify efforts at community connection for the youth in their care, including:

- Partner with (and provide significant funding to) community organizations rooted in neighborhoods where large concentrations of youth on probation reside.
- Work with community-based organizations to provide restorative justice programs.
- Connect probation youth with positive role models in their communities through mentor and advocate programs, volunteer probation officers, CASA, etc.
- Assign a high-ranking staff member to serve as a community liaison whose role will be to promote and strengthen community connections, work with community-based partners and reach out to community members as needed to address needs and goals of individual youth.

Hennepin County is currently partnering with the Legal Rights Center to implement a restorative justice program (highlighted in the best and promising practices section) that has just moved from a pilot into full implementation. The county has historically partnered with community organizations based in BIPOC communities; however, further progress can be made in honoring community voice, grassroots movements, and the specific needs of Minneapolis and Hennepin County youth and families.

Moving forward from JDAI, Juvenile Probation has created an Equity and Innovation unit. One of E&I's first initiatives has been to shift the department's risk and needs assessment tool from the YLS/CMI to the REACT. The REACT seeks to target youth, family, and community needs specific to Hennepin County, rather than relying on national data that may incorporate less diverse or different populations. It allows probation staff and case managers to better match youth's needs to available services within the community-based array, working to address risk by meeting underlying drivers of behavior.

As Juvenile Probation continues to examine how to best match services to needs, the perspectives of youth, family, and community members and research into effective and promising alternatives to OOHP is outlined below.

Focus Group Findings

Many of the recommendations from a (2018) Annie E. Casey Foundation report were mirrored in the wisdom and lived experiences shared by juvenile probation clients, family members, and interested community members. Workgroup members facilitated three focus groups: a youth focus group held on May 20, 2021, a family focus group held on May 20, 2021 and a community focus group held on May 21, 2021. Participants were recruited through Hennepin County Juvenile Probation staff and outreach via social media and community networks. Overall, the perspectives of nine youth, five caregivers, and four community members were gathered and compiled for this report. The focus groups were held over Zoom and participants were made aware that the information gathered was confidential. Youth and families were paid for their participation.

The experiences shared and ideas generated by these focus groups were deeply informative. Across all three groups, a major theme emerged: a significant concern with the system's focus on compliance instead of the humanity and lived experiences of youth and families, as evidenced in the use of out of home placements and the conditions within those placements. Youth, families, and community members shared numerous ideas for how intensive support could be provided in the community through caring adult relationships, employment opportunities, and individualized support for youth. Key findings from the focus groups include:

- Conditions within OOHPs, including discipline procedures and levels of care and comfort, were detrimental to youth's overall success in programming.
- Key relationships with staff and other youth in OOHPs, not the facilities or curriculum itself, were important for youth to make the necessary mindset shifts for them to successfully complete programming.
- Family members want more community resources for youth while community members want more resources for families.
- Mentorship, academic enrichment, employment training and opportunities, financial support, and trauma/relational healing interventions were all identified as necessary for a youth's success in a community intervention.

From the youth focus group, major concerns about OOHPs were raised, including the disclosure of concerning treatment while in placement such as overuse of punitive disciplinary practices, the lack of basic resources for comfort and care, and unclear expectations about what OOHPs were and how success would be measured. These conditions were detrimental to the overall success of young people in placement and contributed to behaviors that create extended stays in OOHPs. Youth identified that small details about a program or its staff make a big difference in their success in that program. For example, multiple young people stated that in OOHP settings, individual staff with shared histories or cultures formed critical relationships that not only provided mentoring support, but also a connection to the development of their cultural identity.

Youth shared that OOHP at times did create the conditions in which they were able to experience a mindset shift necessary for their maturity. It was in placement where they gained perspective on the differences between their lives and those of other youth and the need to make different choices to avoid ending up in a similar situation in the future, a perspective change that one participant stated would've taken longer outside of placement. Youth noted, though, that it was often

specific relationships with staff and other students that facilitated their development, rather than the programming or curriculum of the facilities themselves.

Families in the focus group identified a need for opportunities, resources, and structure to support their youth's needs. They felt that they were being punished alongside their children while a youth was in placement, that there were significant barriers in accessing institutions, and ultimately that placement made key relationships in their youth's lives worse. During their experience with the juvenile justice system, parents sought out numerous community connections for help, though they reported receiving little support.

While families reported searching for support for their youth, broader community members reported searching for support for families. The prevailing recommendation from the community focus group was to prioritize meeting the needs of families and disrupt cycles of unsupportive parenting through wraparound and community-involved interventions. Community members expressed significant concern with the levels of violence in their neighborhoods and a desire for youth and parents to be matched with appropriate, effective programs.

In each of the focus groups, ideas for community-based interventions were shared, both in contrast to OOHPs and from experience with existing community resources. Mentorship was a theme identified across all groups. Youth desire a relationship with a life coach or mentor - someone to connect with one-on-one, who understands their lives, shares their identities and culture, and who can be available every day. It is important to note that young people expressed a desire to have access to these caring relationships and opportunities well before involvement in highly restrictive juvenile justice settings. Caregivers expressed a similar desire for their youth to have relationships with caring adults, and for those relationships to form earlier and to be sustained as youth get older and even transition off of probation. When parents couldn't be present, it was their hope that these caring adult relationships could be sources of oversight for their children.

Youth want opportunities to work towards their future goals, like employment or entrepreneurial training, through programming that is based on their life and routines. Community members made a similar recommendation, for there to be opportunities for youth to prepare for their futures through career days, internships, living wage jobs, and more. They thought it would be important for youth to have pathways to careers and to have their financial needs met. Youth also want to spend time in places in their community where they feel safe and can contribute, where they can show what they've learned and give back. These are spaces that community members also want, physical spaces that are resource laden and safe from violence.

Family members desired the same, structured activities and opportunities for their children to be connected to instead of unstructured time in the community. Families want programs that will help strengthen their relationships with their children and thought that financial incentives would work well to encourage positive behavior, like the current probation practice of rewarding youth for good grades. They wanted to be able to access community resources more easily, without cost or logistical barriers, and earlier, at the initial points of concerns for their children. Community members acknowledged that there are numerous smaller organizations already providing these sorts of services, and that there should be culturally specific trauma and grief support embedded into all programming.

Though the primary conversation of the focus groups was out-of-home placements and community-based alternatives, the actions of other juvenile justice stakeholders were also of concern in the focus groups. In particular, youth did not feel that their public defender supported them or

advocated for their needs and wishes. Family members expressed this same concern, with the added challenge that they were excluded from the process by attorneys and judges. Youth also acknowledged that pretrial detention created challenges for post-adjudication success, including the fact that time at the juvenile detention center was not "counted towards" their stay in placement, especially when long amounts of time were spent in detention when compared to other peers. Families also expressed particular concern about the long-term consequences of juvenile justice system involvement on their children's futures, and wanted resources related to expungements.

Best and Promising Practices

Inspired by the components of a successful alternative to OOHP outlined during the focus groups, workgroup members sought to identify national examples of effective and promising practices. Interventions are highlighted due to their ability to engage and honor community, interrupt patterns of violence, and meet needs expressed by youth, family, and communities. Programs and interventions are broken down into categories based on the intention behind the practice.

GROUP & VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

Hennepin County has recently engaged in Group Violence Intervention (i.e., GVI), primarily with adults and with youth 18 years and older designated Extended Jurisdiction Juvenile (i.e., EJJ). GVI targets clients at risk of committing or being victimized by gun violence. The youth GVI model has begun as an intervention but has not yet been fully implemented. Parts of the GVI model are essential to acknowledging victims and repairing community harm, as well as preventing future violence by utilizing 'the community moral voice' alongside offers of support and resources (National Network for Safe Communities, 2020).

Other components of GVI may not fit the needs of youth and community. Current tensions with law enforcement in Minneapolis and Hennepin County create a level of distrust and concern about continued systemic disparities in police contact and incarceration. A recent report on gun violence and youth in New York City indicated the need to "invest in safety strategies outside of Law Enforcement" as youth interviewed for the research "cited the lack of protection from police and a fear they themselves could be killed by law enforcement as major factors in their decision to carry a gun" (Guns, Safety, and the Edge of Adulthood in New York City, n.d.). Highly publicized, often video-taped incidents between Minneapolis and Hennepin County youth and law enforcement have exacerbated those feelings of disparate treatment and distrust.

Other holistic violence intervention models are available and should be examined as they have a demonstrated history of serving youth effectively. According to Roholt, Johnson-Goodstar, and Eubanks, "gang involvement should be seen not only as a result of risk and protective factors in the lives of young people but also as a youth response to multiple, pervasive social factors, including poverty, historical trauma, and continuing racism—what we are beginning to name social determinants of youth gang activity" (2016).

Credible Messengers and Transformative Mentorship

The Credible Messenger Justice Center (CMJC) in New York utilizes the Arches Transformative Mentorship approach to match justice-involved youth at high risk for recidivism with 'returned citizens', specially-trained adults that share similar background and experiences, called Credible Messengers (Credible Messenger Justice Center, *N.D.*). Credible messengers are paid employees of the CMJC. The model has been replicated in jurisdictions across the country with positive impacts. The approach boasts a 50% reduction in felony level arrests from those in the program (Evaluation of Arches

Transformative Mentoring Program, Urban Institute, August, 2017); youth in the program are 33% less likely to be re-arrested than counterparts (Study by John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2014); and the Richmond, CA Office of Neighborhood Safety reported a 76% reduction in gun homicides in the city after the program was implemented there.

Credible messengers are also utilized as Mentor-Advocates for the Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (i.e., AIM) approach, offering youth one-on-one support that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Mentor-Advocates understand the underlying drivers to community violence and justice system involvement and help youth to create service plans designed to improve individual outcomes and well-being. The AIM approach is utilized as an alternative to OOHP in New York City, where up to programmatic outcomes indicate that 80% of youth participants remain placement free while in the program and only 11% are re-arrested for a felony level offense within a year of enrollment in AIM (Kramer, Lynch, Lipman, Yu, & Astone, 2018).

Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI)

SSYI in Massachusetts utilizes a public health approach to group violence that is not based in arrest or incarceration, rather employing an array of services to young men aged 17-24 at “proven risk” for becoming involved in firearm violence. Services include case management, behavioral health, subsidized employment, and other individualized service plans. The approach seeks to improve healthy development and reduce incarceration and victimization from violent crime.

Studies completed on the SSYI program indicated the following:

- Young men aged 14-24 in the SSYI treatment group were less likely to be incarcerated than those in the comparison group that did not receive SSYI services (Campie, Vrinotis, Read, Fronius & Petrosino, 2014);
- Statistically significant reduction in monthly city-level violent crime victimization rates for 14- to 24-year-old young men in SSYI treatment cities compared to comparison group cities;
- Reductions in city-level homicide, aggravated assault, and non-violent crime victimization rates for 14- to 24-year-old young men in SSYI treatment cities compared to comparison group cities (Petrosino, Turner, Hanson, Fronius & Campie, 2014); and
- The preventive benefit of the SSYI program was close to \$15 million for about a \$2 million investment in program costs.

(Program Profile: Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) | CrimeSolutions, National Institute of Justice (ojp.gov); Safe and Successful Youth Initiative - United Way of Greater New Bedford (unitedwayofgnb.org))

EMPLOYMENT

Literature has long encouraged summer youth employment programs as part of a strategy to reduce youth violence and group involvement (Can Summer Jobs Reduce Violent Crime? - Foundation for Economic Education (fee.org); Summer jobs reduce violence among disadvantaged youth | Science (sciencemag.org)) Hennepin County has contracted with numerous providers and worked with other non-contracted agencies to increase opportunities for youth employment and reduce barriers that

often disallow youth to work. An enhanced focus on work readiness, subsidized employment, and living-wage opportunities is indicated as a violence prevention measure and a strategy to improve long-term well-being and success. Increased investment in this area appears promising.

Homeboy Industries

A program started almost 30 years ago in Los Angeles, Homeboy Industries “provides hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women allowing them to redirect their lives and become contributing members of our community” (Homeboys Industries, 2019). Their network includes numerous programs focused on work readiness training and trauma healing such as a trauma-informed arts center; tattoo removal; academic support through high school equivalency test preparation, college readiness, and reading/writing support; workforce development and support for social enterprises; case management, substance abuse, and mental health services; as well as legal support.

Their program has had significant success in supporting the wellbeing of their clients. For example, their solar panel installation training boasts a 70% graduation rate, compared to the national average of 40%. Through investing in the leadership of their clients, they have also developed over a dozen social enterprises including a bakery, electronics recycling, a grocery store, and a screen-printing/embroidery business.

Work Readiness Enrichment Program

The Work Readiness Enrichment Program (i.e., WREP) in Savannah, Georgia, is an 18-week juvenile court referred program for high-risk youth ages 14 – 16 designed to provide educational programming for disconnected and system-involved youth to catch them up to their academic grade level, provide work readiness training so they are qualified to enter the workforce, and provide support services to help address the root cause of their chronic delinquent behavior and activity (Helping Savannah Youth to Connect to Work, Avoid Confinement, N.D.)

WREP is inspired by Homeboy Industries and is a collaborative effort between government, systems, and community. The program includes a dedicated Probation Officer, public school teachers and staff, Boys & Girls club gang interventionists, behavioral health circles, YMCA financial literacy fundamentals, a food shelf, and free lunches, and more.

DAY TREATMENT & RESPITE

Day treatment has historically been a method of intervention targeted at serving youth with mental health or substance abuse concerns that require a therapeutic educational setting with on-site interventions to meet co-occurring needs. Day treatment and respite opportunities allow youth to maintain family and community bonds while receiving intensive, multi-dimensional intervention. Increasingly, it is recognized that youth encountering law enforcement and juvenile justice systems share many of the challenges, barriers, and needs of youth historically served by day treatment programs. Expanding day treatment opportunities to justice-involved youth can help to address the differing responses in systems to similarly situated youth.

AMIKids Day Treatment

AMIKids Day Treatment Program operates over a dozen day treatment sites for juvenile justice involved youth in Florida (Day Treatment Services, N.D.). Their programming allows youth to attend school, therapy, chemical health treatment, violence intervention programming, and other services in a structured setting, while staying connected to their home and families in the evenings. Youth are involved in meaningful community service to young people and the elderly. The program typically lasts four to six months and has been recognized by both the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the U.S. Department of Justice as an evidence-based model that makes a difference. According to their internal data, 73% of youth that complete their program do not recidivate within one year of completion.

Portland House - Alternative to Incarceration Service

Lutheran Social Services operates an adult group home and intensive community support model in Minneapolis aimed at males aged 18 and older. Portland House's alternative services include goal setting, skill building, case management, in-home support, and an option for respite housing at the group home for any reason. This allows young men to build community relationships that enhance well-being and create connections to reach personal goals. Offering the option to utilize the housing portion of the group home removes barriers to engagement and provides crisis intervention when needed.

Respite Care for System-Involved Youth

New York City's Juvenile Justice Department utilizes two respite option approaches as alternatives to detention and placement. Queens Engagement Strategy for Teens (i.e., QUEST) programming offers alternative to detention case management and connection to services, while also offering temporary respite services to youth and families when a break or assistance resolving conflict is needed. In addition, the Way Home program offers 21-day respite services alongside family team conferencing and intensive therapy for families unable or unwilling to provide housing for their child.

In Hennepin County, the Systemic Family Therapy (i.e., SFT) model and Collaborative Intensive Bridging Services (i.e., CIBS) are offered as an intensive short-term residential stay with ongoing family therapy and planning for youth to continue intervention at home, followed by intensive in-home support for five to seven months. CIBS intervention seeks to stabilize youth by interrupting cycles of behavior and establishing supports and skills that allow youth to remain at home and engage effectively with their families and communities. These interventions are more frequently utilized by social workers for youth in the Health & Human Services system but can be available to Juvenile Probation clients as well.

Though working exclusively with younger children, the programming of the Greater Minneapolis Crisis Nursery models an approach that could be used for older aged youth. The Crisis Nursery provides a 24-hour crisis line, crisis counseling, education and connection to community resources, clinical home visiting and mental health supports, and overnight residential care for up to

three nights while families resolve their crises. This intensive intervention paired with ongoing support has resulted in high rates of family satisfaction, including 99% of families saying they have strategies in place to keep them and their families safe (Brighter Futures, 2019).

RESTORATIVE & COMMUNITY JUSTICE

Research has long supported an emphasis on “encouraging offender accountability through restorative justice, engaging in community service, and helping youths take responsibility and make amends for their actions” (Reforming Juvenile Justice, 2021). The restorative approach is different from what is traditionally used by corrections and by mental health providers:

“Both punitive and treatment models focus little attention on the needs of victims and victimized communities. Neither model engages them as clients or as co-participants in the justice process. Whether treatment or punishment is emphasized, the offender is the passive and solitary recipient of intervention and service. Increasingly reliant on facilities, treatment programs, and professional experts, juvenile justice systems exclude victims and other community members from what could be meaningful roles in sanctioning, rehabilitation, and public safety” (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, N.D.)

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention supports the use of a Balanced and Restorative Justice model for youth which balances accountability, competency, and public safety. Grounded in restorative practices, the community advises the courts on disposition and supports families in making sure their youth are completing their obligation to repair harm (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, N.D.) Monitoring includes community members, rather than solely being done by probation staff, with the goal of full integration and community support.

Youth Restorative Justice Disposition Program

Hennepin County Juvenile Probation currently partners with the Legal Rights Center and community-based restorative practitioners to operate a Youth Restorative Justice Disposition Program (i.e., YRJDP) utilizing circle practice to engage youth, families, communities, and victims in repairing harm. By distributing decision-making power among youth, families, community members, and Hennepin county staff, participants are able to work together to create an accountability plan that focuses on the youth making amends and repairing harm. Youth report feeling valued and satisfied, and once successful in the program, they can ask for early discharge from probation. The program recently moved from a pilot to being fully implemented, and currently serves youth aged 14-17 on supervised probation excluding domestic assault, criminal sexual conduct, and extended jurisdiction juvenile cases.

Queens Youth Justice Center

The Center for Court Innovation operates a network of Community and Youth Justice Centers in New York City. Specific to young people, the Queens Youth Justice Center utilizes a holistic approach to “prevent the negative consequences that often accompany contact with the criminal legal system while addressing clients’ needs to prevent future system involvement. The Justice Center also provides young

people with leadership training, internships, and opportunities to make a positive contribution to the Queens community" (Center for Court Innovation, N.D.).

The Center offers the following programming on-site:

- Adult and juvenile alternatives to incarceration
- Trauma-informed clinical services
- Paid internships and workforce development
- Gender-specific and sexually exploited youth services
 - Team sisterhood
 - Team brotherhood, a violence prevention curriculum
- Neighborhood youth justice council
- Queens youth court where peers engage in the court process of youth
- Intensive community mentoring and community service projects

The Center's 2020 Annual Report (Center for Court Innovation) highlights the holistic nature of the community and youth justice centers in supporting housing stability and basic needs, especially during the COVID crisis as the needs of the community shifted significantly.

Recommendations and Implications

Based on the perspectives shared by youth, families, and community members and supported by research into best and promising practices, this workgroup offers the following array of recommendations for an intensive, community-based alternative to out of home placements. To be successful in better supporting youth and families in their communities, interrupting youth violence perpetration and victimization, and reducing the reliance on out of home placement facilities, each recommendation must be implemented with fidelity itself, and in combination with the others.

Recommendations

1. Financially support community-driven ideas, programs, and initiatives for safety and youth violence interruption.
2. Pursue the addition of a Credible Messengers and/or Transformative Mentorship programming that does not currently exist for youth on Juvenile Probation.
3. Provide all youth on probation and their families access to culturally appropriate trauma services and restorative practices that address the root causes of violence and transform community relationships.
4. Develop a holistic family center based upon healing and resources and operated by and for the community, to include:
 - a. Space to address the multiple needs of youth and provide expansive opportunities for their development.
 - b. Partnership with housing and therapy providers to provide day treatment, respite care, and/or bed space for youth experiencing crisis or conflict.
 - c. Include paid employment or workforce readiness training.
1. Utilize community members as participants in the development and selection of the contracting/RFP process.

Further Context

Significant community violence has mobilized community agencies, formal and informal, to create block patrols and attempts to interrupt harm, in addition to long-standing efforts to meet youth where they are and disrupt group violence. Financially supporting community ideas, programs, and initiatives for safety and youth violence interruption must be at the forefront of any new programs or contracts for youth on Juvenile Probation. This was of primary importance to the community members and families who participated in our focus groups. The City of Minneapolis has indicated plans to partner with multiple agencies, including the Minneapolis Violence Interrupter program and the Community Safety Specialist (CSS) Apprenticeship pilot launched by the Northside Residents

Redevelopment Council and Service Employees International Union, among others (A Minneapolis Model for Community Safety & Accountability, 2021). Collaborating to support these initiatives and the development of others is necessary to respond to community concerns and improve safety and community well-being.

Intensive, 24/7 mentorship opportunities are also strongly recommended and could be accomplished by pursuing the creation of a Credible Messengers and/or Transformative Mentorship program for youth on Juvenile Probation. During the focus groups, youth acknowledged the critical roles of mentors that they met in OOHPs and afterwards in supporting their development and success in community. More and earlier access to these relationships are a critical factor in a successful alternative.

In order to disrupt the cycle of violence and to address deeply rooted trauma, all youth on probation should have the opportunity to participate in culturally appropriate trauma services and restorative practices. This intervention should include neighbors, broader community members, and victims, as exemplified by the Balanced and Restorative Justice model, and place decision-making and accountability in the hands of those most directly impacted by harm, rather than system stakeholders. Youth, family, and community members who participated in focus groups identified the need for ending generational patterns through addressing the root causes of harm and violence. This only happens by transforming community relationships, not through continual system intervention that focuses primarily on compliance. Offering grief resolution programming to all youth in contact with the system may be one way to support this recommendation.

In listening to parents and families impacted by the juvenile justice system, a need for a holistic family center based upon healing and resources is also apparent, in a location close to community and readily available to all youth and families. Hennepin County partners with Minneapolis Public Schools and The Link to operate a Youth Connection Center serving young people aged 10-17 who have been in contact with law enforcement for low-level offenses, truancy, and curfew. While the center provides safe space, case management, needs screening, and other short-term interventions, they do not currently have employment readiness, respite, or dedicated community and family space, or serve youth with more significant offenses and needs. In focus groups, parents reported wanting more options for family therapy and basic needs support, as well as grief counseling, family activities and bonding opportunities, and peer/community support. According to Roholt, Johnson-Goostar, and Eubanks,

“Tribal government has begun to support robust and sustainable youth centers. In a very short period of time, these centers have attracted large numbers of community young people on a daily basis. The role and value of community centers and community designed interventions in reducing youth involvement in gang activity should be considered” (Roholt, Johnston-Goodstart, & Eubanks, 2016).

Such centers should also offer paid employment or workforce readiness training to both prevent future justice system involvement and as a tool for financial independence. Holistic care centers may also seek to partner with housing and therapy providers to provide day treatment, respite care, and/or bed space for youth experiencing homelessness, crisis, or family conflict. Similar to the model used by Homeboy Industries, a dedicated space with supportive personnel and wraparound programming can address the multiple needs of youth and can provide expansive opportunities for their development. In examining the current model used by Portland House Group Home operated by

Lutheran Social Services of MN, the opportunity to come and go from the housing part of the program removes barriers and provides stability and support that allows for greater focus on other goals and needs. In New York City, the Queens Community Justice Center offers a holistic approach to family, youth, and community intervention and support, returning decision-making power to communities as they seek to address delinquency, community violence, and well-being.

Communities know themselves better than systems ever will. To effectively confront white supremacy culture and the resulting disproportionate minority confinement, community decision-making and involvement is essential. As such, the community should be engaged as participants in the development and selection of the contracting and request for proposals (i.e., RFP) process. The Contract Services Department has indicated the ability to provide financial compensation for youth, families, and others with lived experience to participate in the planning and selection processes. Parents, families, youth, and community members hold the solutions to broader social problems and should continue to be provided the space to engage in problem solving and intervention creation.

Further Exploration

There were many topics covered within the focus groups which did not fit within specific recommendations for an intensive alternative to out of home placements. Additional conversation and examination of how Juvenile Probation might address or support the following concerns is warranted.

1. The closure of the Hennepin County Youth RTC and sexual health treatment program may indicate the need for additional support for youth required to complete primary sexual health treatment in a residential setting.
2. Youth indicated the inability to maintain their identity in OOHP settings. Specifically, they reported not having access to the items and things that make them feel like themselves (personal clothing, shoes, hygiene items, etc.). Creating physical comfortability for youth that do enter OOHP may be helpful in engaging youth in their treatment programming more effectively.
3. Sleep hygiene and well-being should be explored for youth in residential settings. This may already take place in some programs, however, youth with experience of OOHP overwhelmingly reported poor or uncomfortable beds in facilities. Without adequate, restful sleep, youth understandably struggle to participate in meaningful ways.
4. During the family focus group, family members shared a desire for family programming offered through DOCCR. Family programming currently exists on the array of services, and there have been attempts to identify barriers to usage. Offering the full array of community-based services early on and often during supervision may need to be standardized to minimize discretion and increase opportunity.

Conclusion

Hennepin County as a system must continue to adapt and support the ideas, innovations, and interventions that community and those with lived experience have been implementing or attempting for decades. Paid employment, credible messengers, and holistic opportunities for healing and grief resolution should be utilized to engage youth and interrupt patterns of violence and justice system involvement. Returning decision-making power and financial support to the impacted communities creates space for increased equity and justice. The voices of those impacted by delinquency should have equal positions in disposition and restorative practices, including youth, families, community, victims, and probation.

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