

Youth Reentry in Rural Communities: Strengths, Challenges, and Strategies

2022 Second Chance Month

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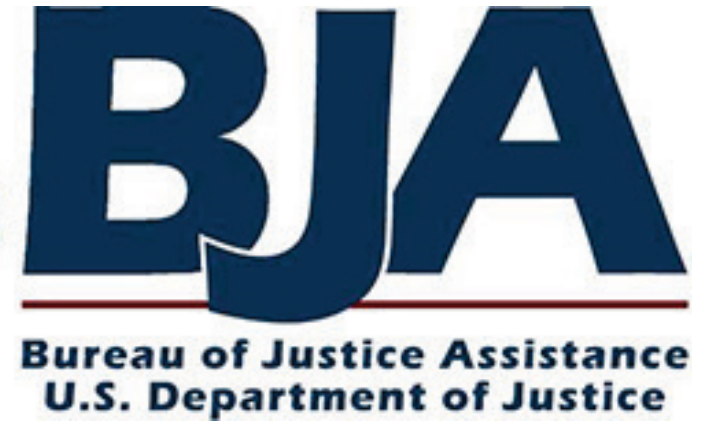
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Second Chance Month – April 2022

Help individuals, communities, and agencies across the country recognize the importance of reentry and their role in building second chances



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Presenters

- Michael Umpierre, JD, Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, Georgetown University (CJJR)
- Shay Bilchik, JD, CJJR
- Christine Humowitz, MA, CJJR
- Brett Peterson, Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services
- Christy Doyle, PhD, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice
- Becki Moore, Massachusetts Department of Youth Services

Overview

- Background on the rural reentry brief series
- Key strengths and challenges in rural jurisdictions
- Importance of partnership
- Summary of briefs
 - Jurisdictional examples
- Main takeaways



Key Strengths of Rural Jurisdictions

- Pride in community, culture, and history
- Strong working relationships between rural community members and rural service providers
- Strong informal support networks, including family friends, neighbors, coaches, mentors, and others



Common Challenges in Rural Reentry

- Lack of specialized services
- Distance from services and lack of transportation
- Lack of prosocial activities and/or employment opportunities



Partnership as a Common Thread

- Successful reentry requires a variety of partnerships
 - Educational and vocational providers
 - Youth and families
 - Medical and behavioral health professionals
- Engaging partners early and often is critical



Education and Employment in the Rural Reentry Context



Setting the Stage: **Education and Employment**

- Education is correlated with employment outcomes like labor market success, potential earnings, and ability to obtain a full-time job (Aliprantis & Zenker, 2011)
- Together, education and employment are strong indicators of involvement in criminal and delinquent behavior (OJJDP, 2017b)
- Juvenile correctional agencies may not offer educational and vocational services of equal quality to the services available in a youth's home community (CSG Justice Center, 2015; OJJDP, 2019)
- Learning disabilities may pose additional challenges (Fitzgerald, 2020; Sedlak & McPherson, 2010)



Strategies: Education and Employment

- Collaborate on reentry planning and service delivery on both a systems level and an individual level
 - Identify stakeholders and build partnerships
 - Come to an understanding of everyone's role and your group's overall goals
 - Create a plan of action with measurable outcomes
 - Measure both system- and individual-level outcomes of collaboration
- Leverage relationships with the community to create employment opportunities
- Use technology to further support educational and employment services and reentry planning



Strategies in Practice: Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services

Brett Peterson, Director, Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services



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Supporting the Educational and Vocational Goals of Youth Returning to Rural Utah from DJJS Facilities

Higher education opportunities while in custody and beyond—a response to limited resources

- Partnerships with vocational colleges to deliver virtual instruction
- Helping youth achieve portable and stackable credentials
- Supported by tech (e.g., laptops for youth upon community reentry)
- Essential component of youth's reentry plan

“I'm taking the opportunity to better myself, so I put all I had into it. I've been doing really good with it. It looks good on my transcripts. I'm starting to embrace [education] a lot more than I used to.”

“The best thing about it? “I like the part where you think something is hard, and then you get it. It makes you feel smart.”



Career Development for Youth in Rural Utah: Overcoming Scarce Opportunities

DJJS Reentry Strategies:

- Statewide Youth Employment Coordinator—understanding and meeting the needs of rural communities and youth
- State-wide employers with career structures
- *Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA)*
- Connections/outreach
- Linking youth in rural Utah to credible messengers



Successful Partnership: **Education and Employment**

- Create clearly defined partnerships with educational institutions and organizations who can provide youth with educational supports and vocational opportunities
- Leverage strong relationships already present in rural communities
- Maintain relationships with providers and reach out to new potential partners when necessary to meet a youth's unique needs



Health and Well-Being in the Rural Reentry Context



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Setting the Stage: **Health and Well-Being**

- Health and well-being have physical and mental components
 - Both are informed by social determinants of health (CDC, 2021)
- System-involved youth are more likely to have a mental health, substance use, or co-occurring disorder (OJJDP, 2017a)
- Rural youth may be more vulnerable to poor outcomes related to health and well-being
 - Potential lack of specialized care, especially for already vulnerable populations like youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth
 - Possible lack of positive youth development activities



Strategies: Health and Well-Being

- Integrating health and well-being with youth-facing systems
 - Creating partnerships with systems focused on health and well-being so all systems share common goals
- Improving accessibility of services
 - Examples: rideshare and other transportation initiatives, mobile clinics, technology, hub and spoke models
- Training and capacity building: incentivizing providing health and well-being services and supports in rural communities



Strategies in Practice: Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice

Christy Doyle, Director of the Office of Behavioral Health Services,
Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice



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Return From DJJ Facilities

Reentry within Georgia DJJ begins when a youth is admitted to a long-term facility:

- Each youth is staffed at the multidisciplinary Youth-Centered Reentry Team (YCRT) within 10 days of admission. Team meetings occur at regular intervals
- As the youth gets closer to discharge, the YCRT meetings increase in frequency. The providers who will serve the youth in their communities are invited to attend, in person or virtually
- Each youth works with a reentry specialist who is based in their area for 60 days to help ensure that the processes that were set up in the facility actually work in practice
- DJJ is preparing to launch its first youth forensic peer and parent peer positions. These staff will be certified peer specialists who work directly with youth with high mental health needs and their caregivers, to help them identify and leverage resources in their local communities



Formal, Ongoing Partnerships

- It takes a village to return a child to their community
- Georgia DJJ participates in numerous interagency processes to help maximize youth health and wellness when they return to their homes:
 - Local Interagency Planning Teams (LIPT): Multidisciplinary teams to leverage community resources for each youth. Each community brings together local child-serving resources, including state agency representatives, the local school system, providers, faith community representatives, civic organizations, and others specifically to coordinate the behavioral health needs of youth in their communities
 - The Interagency Directors Team (IDT): The child and adolescent workgroup of the state Behavioral Health Coordinating Council. This body gathers director-level staff from all state child-serving agencies as well as treatment providers, advocates, and other stakeholders, and provides input on state policy and support to local practice, including LIPTs
 - The Child and Adolescent Health Coalition: A group organized by the Voices for Georgia's Children advocacy organization. This group monitors laws, policies, and practices related to child and adolescent services as well as model programs and pilots around the state. Action items for advocacy groups are often developed in this group

Initiatives for DJJ and Local Partners

- The APEX school mental health program, which provides mental health services in rural schools during and after school hours
- Youth Clubhouses in rural areas, which include social activities, and mental health and substance use treatment resources. Transportation is provided
- Implementation of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) directly in schools, allowing a youth's school to also serve as their health home. Some school-based FQHCs also include mental health and/or dental services
- Continuation/expansion of virtual health and mental health services, which can include:
 - Specialty services that once may have required a youth to go to a residential placement
 - Supportive activities such as support groups and other peer groups
 - Social activities such as photography classes, book clubs, and so forth to offer youth expanded opportunities for interaction and engagement



Successful Partnership: Health and Well-Being

- Juvenile justice should seek out partnerships with organizations and agencies focused on health and well-being of youth
 - Making sure that in this regard all partners have the same vision and goals
- Continuous communication between partners is essential, especially between agencies serving the same youth
 - Partners must work together to identify individual strengths, risks, and needs of youth
 - Importance of information sharing, especially regarding mental and behavioral health of youth



Family Engagement in the Rural Reentry Context



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Setting the Stage: Family Engagement

- Family engagement: any role or activity that enables families to have direct and meaningful input and influence on systems, policies, programs, or practices affecting services for children and families (Children's Bureau, 2017)
- Strong family connections can lead to improved academic performance, reduced negative behaviors, and reduced prevalence and severity of reoffending (Winokur, Early et al., 2013)
- Families as the vital link between youth and their communities



Strategies: Family Engagement

- Broadly defining family
- Encouraging positive youth–family connections while in placement
 - Taking pointed steps to counter challenges like distance, transportation, or technological barriers
- Including families in the assessment, treatment, and reentry process
 - Prioritizing cultural competency in service offerings
- Empowering families to transform systems
 - Asking pointed questions about families’ strengths, needs, and wishes and using the answers to inform policies and practices



Strategies in Practice: Massachusetts Department of Youth Services

Becki Moore, Director of Community Operations,
Massachusetts Department of Youth Services

Family Advisory Council

OJJDP Second Chance Act grant-funded initiative

Develop family-informed practice (via statewide Family Advisory Councils (FACs) guided by family engagement specialists) aimed at increasing supports for families to increase housing stability and enhance the effective use of kinship placements

STRATEGIC FOCUS

- Recruit new parent-members to replicate FACs across additional Department of Youth Services (DYS) regions
- Introduce FAC parent-members to department policies, practices, and procedures to improve their understanding of the functions of the department and inform the development of policies and procedures related to community reentry

ENHANCEMENTS

- Paid parent partners through procurement
- Parents/family as mentors



Family Engagement Specialist

The primary role of the family engagement specialist is to increase and maintain engagement with DYS youth and their families

- Assist DYS casework staff in identifying strategies for engaging youths' families
- Work with youth and their families throughout the DYS continuum based on individual need
- Implement initiatives to promote and maintain family involvement throughout a youth's commitment to DYS

Use of Technology

Examine touchpoints within a youth's commitment during which increased connectedness through technology can be leveraged. Provide needed technology and coach in its use

- Program visits
- Clinical engagement
- Meeting participation



Successful Partnership: **Family Engagement**

- Considering family engagement as an opportunity to collaborate with families, not a challenge to communicate information to families
- Regarding families as equal decision-making partners
- Engaging families early and often in the case planning and reentry planning processes



Main Takeaways

- Partnership with community stakeholders is a key component in all aspects of rural reentry
 - Educational and vocational partners
 - Medical and behavioral health organizations
 - Youth and families themselves
- Rural communities have many unique strengths that can be leveraged to improve service offerings for youth reentering their communities



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Questions?

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