

Strategies for Youth Reentry in Rural Communities Transcript

Simon Gonsoulin:

Welcome to today's webinar, Youth Reentry in Rural Communities: Strengths, Challenges, and Strategies. This is the official notice that the webinar will be recorded. And we want to make sure you know that up front. As you notice, it was just stated by Dierdra, who is working logistically for us, that this will be recorded. It will be placed on the NRRC's website sometime in May when all of the other Second Chance Act webinars and resources are listed there for dissemination.

Simon Gonsoulin:

I'm Simon Gonsoulin. I'm the project director of the Corrections & Community Engagement Technical Assistance Center that is funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and is housed at the American Institutes for Research.

Simon Gonsoulin:

AIR is a nonpartisan, not for profit organization. We conduct behavioral and social science research and deliver technical assistance through relationship-based technical assistance methods and partnering with peer organizations to strengthen our TA approach. Our partner, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University, is providing content and leading this webinar today. We are thrilled to have the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform as a partner on CCETAC. And you will really be treated to a wonderful webinar in just a couple more minutes.

Simon Gonsoulin:

A few more introductory points. I just wanted to let you know that BJA and OJJDP promote Second Chance Act Month on a national basis to really call attention to the importance of building second chances. There will be over 26 webinars and numerous resources shared during the month of April.

Simon Gonsoulin:

So, look to that website. And participate in these webinars. And take a look at those resources because they certainly will help the greater reentry field.

Simon Gonsoulin:

Finally, before turning things over to CJJR, you may want to track news and updates pertaining to Second Chance Act Month on various social media outlets. So, take a look at the NRRC website. And also, check things out through social media outlets. Without any further delay, I'm going to go ahead and turn this over to Michael Umpierre, who is the director for the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University. Michael, it's all yours.

Michael Umpierre:

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Simon. And welcome, everybody to our webinar today. We're so delighted that you're with us and really delighted to be part of the Second Chance Month activities. We want to thank our partners at the Department of Justice for elevating the critical importance that strong reentry policy and practice play in achieving positive outcomes for youth and families and communities and also thank our partners at AIR for giving us the opportunity to speak with you all today.

Michael Umpierre:

As Simon mentioned, I'm Michael Umpierre. I'm the director of the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University. And for those of you who may not be familiar with our work, CJJR is a research center housed within the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown that really aims to improve the lives of young people who touch the justice system or at risk of touching the justice system. And we do that by hosting a variety of research-based training and technical assistance programs and initiatives, including our certificate programs and our practice models.

Michael Umpierre:

Since our organization's inception in 2007, we've worked with literally hundreds of leaders from hundreds of jurisdictions across the United States, including those working in rural communities, to advance a more holistic and multisystem and effective approach to serving young people and families. As I mentioned, we're especially honored to be partners with AIR on CCETAC and also to support the work of the National Reentry Resource Center as well as the Center for Coordinated Assistance to States, or CCAS. Each of which are federally supported initiatives providing the field with extremely valuable resources, training and TA.

Michael Umpierre:

As you know, we're here today to talk about youth reentry policy and practice particularly as it pertains to young people who are reentering rural communities. This topic is one that we at CJJR have really had the privilege of delving deeply into as part of our work with AIR on those initiatives that I mentioned building off of all of our work across the United

States. And today, as you'll here, as part of this effort, including our work with CCETAC and the National Reentry Resource Center, CJJR in partnership with AIR and our federal partners will soon be releasing a series of briefs that highlight strategies for supporting youth reentry in rural communities.

Michael Umpierre:

And particularly, briefs that highlight three important domains in the context of reentry. And we're going to be exploring these today. Those include education and employment, promoting the health and wellbeing of young people, and engaging and partnering with families the process. These briefs will be made available on the NRRC website soon. So, stay tuned for that.

Michael Umpierre:

But today, as I mentioned, we're really bringing this conversation, these topics to life by featuring a number of fantastic thought leaders and practitioners in the field to talk about some of the concrete strategies that we can improve outcomes for this youth population. To lead this discussion, I'm joined today by two of my colleagues at the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform; Shay Bilchik, CJJR founder and director emeritus, as well as Christine Humowitz, CJJR program coordinator. Both Shay and Christine have been intricately involved in the development of these briefs and are essential members of our team at the center. And I want to welcome both Shay and Christine. And you'll be hearing from them shortly.

Michael Umpierre:

We're also joined today by three remarkable leaders in our field. And it really is a treat to be able to hear from each of them today because they represent juvenile justice agencies from states that have significant rural areas and are actively working to serve young people who are reentering those rural communities after stays in facilities whether in detention or commitment facilities. So, we're really honored to be able to feature this wonderful trio of leaders, including Brett Peterson, director of the Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services; Dr. Christy Doyle, director of the Office of Behavioral Health within the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice; and Becki Moore, director of community operations within the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services. Welcome, Brett, Christy and Becki. And we look forward to hearing from you in just a few minutes.

Michael Umpierre:

So, the plan for today's discussion, as you can see on the screen, is as follows. First, we'll talk briefly about some of the key strengths and challenges faced by rural communities with regard to reentry work, including talking about the important role that cross-system partnerships really play in this endeavor. Then, we'll delve into each of the core areas explored in these briefs, again, thinking about, "How can we best support the educational and employment goals of young people who are reentering rural areas?"

Michael Umpierre:

Talking about how we can promote young people's health and wellbeing through this work. And then lastly, really focusing on family engagement as an essential element of this work. And again, we're going to be hearing about these concrete strategies that are being implemented in Utah, in Georgia and Massachusetts so that we can have a nice conversation about what's promising with respect to improving outcomes for young people, for families and communities.

Michael Umpierre:

Finally, we will have some time at the end of this webinar for Q&A. And to that end, we want to encourage all of you to submit your questions in writing via the chat box on your screen. We don't have the ability to open up the phone lines today.

Michael Umpierre:

But we do want to hear from you. So, if you have questions as we go along, please put them in the chat. And we'll do our best to answer as many questions as possible, time permitting.

Michael Umpierre:

So, without further ado, let's get started. And on the next slide, we want to talk a little bit about the strengths of rural jurisdictions. As I mentioned, we at CJJR have had the privilege of working with leaders from literally hundreds of jurisdictions over the years, including those who work in rural communities. And we know, from this body of work, that rural communities present a wonderful number of strengths that they really can leverage as we support young people who are returning home from detention and commitment facilities.

Michael Umpierre:

Now, as we've written these briefs and supported the field in this body of work, we actually have explored, what exactly do we mean when we say, "Rural communities?" And this has led to really fascinating conversations about the definition of "rural areas," because, as many of you may know, how rural communities are defined actually can vary

based on population size, concentration of population clusters, landmass, and other factors. And while government agencies, like the United States Census Bureau, the Department of Agriculture just to name a few, actually employ different definitions based on these variables, for our purposes today, we are thinking about and defining "rural areas" quite broadly. Ultimately, we're focusing on those areas, territories or populations that are not urban. And our goal is not really to getting tied up with a specific definition of what "rural areas" entails but rather to discuss the type of strategies related to reentry that really can make a difference in supporting young people and families and communities to see those positive outcomes that we all care about.

Michael Umpierre:

As part of our work with CCETAC and with the NRRC and CCAS, we actually have had an opportunity at the center to speak with dozens of leaders and staff from these rural areas to hear directly from them about what they perceive to be the greatest strengths and challenges that they face with respect to this work, including in the context of reentry. And on this slide, you see some of the themes that have been shared with us through these conversations as well as themes that we have seen through our own observations over the years. This includes things like a sense of pride in their communities, cultures and histories; well-established working relationships between community members and service providers; and the presence of small informal support networks for young people, including family friends and neighbors and coaches and mentors and members of the faith community, members of the business community and others. Overall, rural leaders, like many of you who are with us today on this webinar, routinely have expressed to us that there often exists a local ethos within rural areas that really prioritizes supporting one's neighbors, supporting one's fellow community members. And this is just an incredible strength when we think about our ultimate goal, which is to support young people and families to succeed in the long run.

Michael Umpierre:

On the next slide, you'll see that, of course, just like there are strengths, there are challenges as well. And in these conversations, practitioners and partners in rural areas have shared with us barriers that can stand in the way of effective reentry practice. And you see some of them reflected on this slide. This may include, in many places, a lack of specialized services.

Michael Umpierre:

As we think about connecting young people upon reentry, we know, for example, that many youths reentering rural communities have significant behavioral health needs, needs related to mental health and substance use issues. And yet, in many rural communities, access to those specialized behavioral health services can be limited whether due to provider shortages or other factors. When it comes to serving youth in custody and reentry planning, a distance between the facility and the young person's home community can present significant challenges too.

Michael Umpierre:

In many rural areas, there may not actually be a local juvenile facility, which means that young people who do need to be placed in the facilities are actually placed far away from their homes. And that distance can have serious ramifications regarding how agency staff really engage families and other partners who really support the work and support the reentry practice. And this could be further complicated by the lack of low-cost or no-cost public transportation options available to youth and families in many of these places. And then finally, similar to the lack of specialized services, we also have heard that in many places there's a need for additional pro-social and employment opportunities for young people in these rural areas. This includes things like more civic engagement opportunities; a wider array of programming in the arts and music and sports; access to mentoring and afterschool programs; career, technical and vocational programming; and so, on and so forth.

Michael Umpierre:

Next slide, please. And so, through it all, we know from the research and from our experience... and you'll hear this really elevated through our conversation today is that partnerships really matter, right? In order to really effectively support young people in the reentry process, including for those young people going back to rural communities, it really is essential that we're investing in and supporting cross-system and multidisciplinary partnerships working hand in hand with young people and families.

Michael Umpierre:

And so, for our purposes today, given that we're talking about education, employment, health and wellbeing, and family engagement, we're going to be talking about the types of partnerships in those domains that are essential. But, of course, when we think about it more broadly in the context of reentry, the range of partnerships needed is quite broad, right? It includes individuals from the faith community, from business communities, credible messengers, mentors, life coaches, leaders from community-based organizations and more. It really takes a village to do this work well. And you'll see that again reflected by the information shared by my wonderful colleagues today.

Michael Umpierre:

So, I hope that sets the context of what we're talking about today. And without further ado, I'd like to turn it over now to Christine to talk a little bit about the first area of these briefs, which is focused on education and employment, and then to pass the baton on to Brett Peterson, the director of the Utah system to talk about the wonderful work his agency is doing in Utah. So with that, Christine, the floor is yours.

Christine Humowitz:

Thanks so much, Michael. And, as Michael said earlier, my name is Christine Humowitz. And I am a program coordinator at the center working on our certification program team. And I'm so excited to be talking to you guys today about this brief focused on education and employment in the rural reentry context.

Christine Humowitz:

So to set the stage a little bit for the content of this brief, it's important to note how education and employment are tied to one another. In a 2011 study by Aliprantis and Zenker, they found that educational attainment is directly correlated with employment-related outcomes, like labor market success, potential earnings, and the ability to obtain a full-time job. System-involved youth, in many cases, tend to experience barriers in educational attainment, which therefore can lead to obstacles in attaining successful labor market outcomes as a result of the connection between education and employment.

Christine Humowitz:

Furthermore, when you take education and employment together, they can be strong indicators of future system involvement when there is a lack of attainment in terms of education and employment. So together, education and employment can actually be protective factors for youth reentering their communities. And so, it's extremely important for juvenile justice agencies to provide youth with access to quality educational and vocational services while they are in care so they can reenter their communities in the most successful way possible.

Christine Humowitz:

Despite the importance of this, however, a 2015 study by the Council of State Governments Justice Center found that out of all the juvenile correctional agencies across the United States, only eight state agencies provided educational and vocational opportunities comparable to those available in youths' home communities. Offering comparable services is essential so youth don't fall behind while they are in placement. And this issue can only further be compounded in rural areas when they face additional challenges, like Michael mentioned earlier, in terms of long distances to necessary services, a lack of transportation funding, barriers to information sharing, or other issues. And furthermore, these barriers are exacerbated for youth with unaddressed learning disabilities. These youth may not have access to necessary special education or vocational opportunities in juvenile justice facilities and, at the same time in their transition back to their communities, may have scarce resources in the communities they are returning to.

Christine Humowitz:

So, in light of all of this, what can systems do to bolster education and employment-related outcomes for rural youth reentering their communities? First off and really focusing on the partnership piece that Michael mentioned earlier, juvenile justice agencies need to take the lead in collaborating with a variety of partners on the systems level and the individual level in reentry planning and service delivery. These partners should include a wide variety of stakeholders, including organizations like schools, community-based organizations, business, and youth and families themselves in addition to individuals and groups who are a part of youth informal support networks, including mental health services and faith-based organizations.

Christine Humowitz:

So, this brief will offer a framework for creating these partnerships. And this framework is adapted from a 2006 framework from Linda Harris that she wrote for the Center for Law and Social Policy. Harris's framework was really focused on juvenile justice and employment partnerships. But we add to this in this brief by discussing educational partnerships as well as the importance of collaboration on both a systems level as well as on an individual case planning level.

Christine Humowitz:

So, to briefly go through the steps in the framework we posit in the brief, the first step here is to identify stakeholders and build sustainable partnerships with those stakeholders. Connections to local school districts and business owners are especially critical so youth can be connected with local educational and vocational supports while they are in care that will be there to support them upon reentry into their community. The next step here is to establish an understanding of your partners' and groups' overall goals and each partner's role in achieving these goals. And this should be considered both in terms of conditions for general inter-agency partnerships as well as defining the goals for each youth's specific reentry team.

Christine Humowitz:

The next step here to create an action plan with measurable goals. For example, on a systems level, partners may consider how they want to gather data to show a chosen initiative had its intended effects. While on an individual level, a reentry team may want to consider what success will look like for the specific youth that they are doing reentry planning for.

Christine Humowitz:

And then lastly in this framework, partners will need to measure the outcomes of their collaboration both quantitatively and qualitatively. And this data should inform future work they do related to educational and vocational attainment for rural youth reentering their communities. And so, as Michael said earlier, partnerships are incredibly important in achieving these improved outcomes in all of the areas of the briefs that we'll discuss. And these partnerships will be most successful when juvenile justice agencies are working to create and maintain very strong relationships with these rural service providers.

Christine Humowitz:

Rural communities often have very strong bonds that tie them together. So, it's important for juvenile justice agencies to form partnerships with organizations in communities who are ready and willing to serve youth because they have these strong ties to their community. In a minute, I will turn to Brett from Utah DJJS, who will speak about how Utah has really taken this body of work and ran with it in terms of creating partnerships with educational and vocational service providers.

Christine Humowitz:

And then finally, the last bullet points here. Technology can be used to further connect youth with services and supports that they may not otherwise have access to. While in-person services are preferred, having virtual options can help youth connect with services that they may not otherwise be able to obtain and can really help bolster already available services that may be currently present in a juvenile justice facility. So, we can move to the next slide. And with that, I will turn it over to Brett Peterson, the director of the Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services, to talk about Utah's work in this area of educational and employment in reentry.

Brett Peterson:

Thank you, Christine. It's great to be here. What an honor.

Brett Peterson:

Excited to be able to be a part of Second Chance Month. I'm a big believer and a big beneficiary of many, many second chances. And so I love being able to share today.

Brett Peterson:

Utah, especially using Michael's definition of everything that's not urban, we definitely have a lot of rural. We even have some areas that somebody, I think the Census Bureau, classifies as frontier. So, we do have some areas that are quite far-flung.

Brett Peterson:

And I love that you all were able to emphasize the partnerships and some of the magic that happens in rural communities. I see it in urban areas as well. I'll see great staff who find those partnerships and approach things from a multisystem systemic lens. But in the rural communities, it's something that's brought about out of necessity.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:23:04]

Brett Peterson:

So, you see it I think on a whole other level, often there's just a lack of resources. We're in this phase of juvenile justice. As our population shrink in Utah, my post adjudication population has gotten so small that it presents new challenges. So, it's wonderful that I don't have hundreds of kids coming from rural communities. But when I do get the one or the two or the three or the four, how do I make sure they have every chance and every opportunity that every other kid has that you would want your kid to have? That's really at the center and the heart of our philosophy. So, balancing those problems, those challenges.

Brett Peterson:

So first I'm going to touch a little bit upon higher education and also the vocational. I've got a quote here as well that I'll share from one of our young people. One of the best things that came out of COVID for us was a new lens, a new pair of glasses when we looked at some of our partnerships and some of our opportunities. So, we actually had a university that started having conversations with us and saying, "Look, how do we make sure, we've had some different types of opportunities for higher education for our youth, but they were always informal." They were kind of ad hoc. They weren't with a professor, they were maybe some types of correspondence course, all these different varieties of things. Well, we actually started having conversations with a university. It's a state level university. But they're in a more rural

area. And we started having these conversations about, the state had provided some higher educational opportunities for rural communities, nothing to do with juvenile justice, but they just leveraged technological supports.

Brett Peterson:

So basically, they started having this conversation. Why can't we do that for the kids in JJS? We always ran into, how do you set up a robust higher ed program for five youth here, five youth there, maybe total you have 40 or 50, how do you do that? And so, this partner came to the table, this university and said, "Look, we can do this. We have the tech now. We have the ability; we have professors that are ready so these kids can have real actual college classes." And the big things to think about when you're going through this brief and when you're looking at implementation, there's some very simple elements that I think are essential when you're looking at educational opportunities for young people, that they may be in a facility that's not in a rural community and they may be transitioning to a rural community.

Brett Peterson:

Or if they're in a facility in a rural community, going back to a rural community, doesn't really matter. Those concepts are portable and stackable. So first of all, whatever the educational opportunity is, make sure it's portable. So, the credits these kids get, they can use them at any higher educational institution in Utah. This partner of our university, it's Utah Tech University. They actually just offered a scholarship for all of our kids leaving their higher ed program. And so, they can take that. They can go to any state-run university and those things are all portable. And then stackable, especially when we're looking at the vocational components, making sure that these are... What I want is when I have a young person that's in one of my facilities and let's say they participate in a welding certification. Maybe they only get two thirds of the way done and then they're looking at reentry. I need to make sure they can take that with them and that they can then go and build on that welding certification.

Brett Peterson:

And so, the way we've kind of built it, it is critically centered on our partnerships, is making sure that whatever they gain with us, they can take it with them and they can then leverage it. And the last thing too that I'll touch on, this education component, and then I'm going to transition to employment. If I find out about a youth... I don't want to put it that way. That makes me sound way too grumpy. But when I find out, or hear or learn about situations where a youth wanted to continue in their higher ed or their vocational programming, and they couldn't because they didn't have a laptop or they didn't have Wi-Fi, I just want to lose my mind over that. It's completely unacceptable.

Brett Peterson:

So, we've purchased laptops. We've used second chance funds. We have every youth that's leaving our care, we can get them a cell phone that has a hotspot, and they have a laptop. Because especially when you're talking rural communities, the digital divide becomes very, very real. So, you've got to think about it from that perspective. Okay, we're going to get them their start, but how do we make sure they can take it with them, and they have the tech they need to succeed? So, these couple quotes, these are from some young people in some of our courses. "I'm taking the opportunity to better myself, so I put all I had into it. I've been 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."

Brett Peterson:

And that's the power of these types of opportunities, for each young person I talk to it's one of the first things they talk about, is how proud they are being able to participate in a college class that matters. That's real. If you could go to the next slide. So, I wanted to talk just quickly on education. I know we just have a brief moment. It's always been a challenge, especially when you have kids going out to communities that might be struggling for anybody to find jobs, let alone someone who's coming from a JJS facility. We always leveraged voluntary approaches, who knew who, just tapping into networks. We finally realized we had to get more deliberate. We had to get more strategic.

Brett Peterson:

So, we put in place, we hired a statewide youth employment coordinator. Now we got really lucky, and we focused on the person we got, they actually are from a rural community. They have rural connections. They've been a rural case manager. So, they understood both our rural and our urban challenges for our young people. And then we looked at it and said, "Okay, how do we build statewide opportunities?"

Brett Peterson:

Because our population is shrinking, it's small, we would get employers and they would maybe want to work with our young people, but it might be one kid every six months. And so, we had to make sure we found employers that understood, look, we don't know when kids will be coming your way, but here's when they will or how they will. And we found a couple large statewide employers. In every state you're in, every jurisdiction, there are companies and entities that have statewide reach or multi-state reach. They're out there, and there's not a state that doesn't have that. We

found a couple of those, so that no matter where a young person is, maybe they're in our urban area, they're in Salt Lake, they start with that company. There's a career pathway with that company. There's a structure, there's a shared philosophy. They philosophically want to help these young people. They want to see them get ahead. But eventually they want to transition back to their home community, this employer is also there. So that was something we very deliberately did.

Brett Peterson:

And then again, looking at credible messengers, there's nothing more important than that pure voice from my perspective, that voice of someone who's been there, who's been through it. Especially if they're from a community, a similar community as the young person. So, these are all things that we've started to leverage. I've just touched upon a couple here that are really starting to make the difference and making sure basically being deliberate in your strategies, in your approaches, when you're looking at saying, "How is this going to serve all of our kids?" So, yeah, I just wanted to touch upon those few things. Thanks. I guess turn back to Christine.

Christine Humowitz:

Perfect. Thank you so much, Brett. And then in closing, I just wanted to summarize a little bit about what successful partnerships look like related to education and employment outcomes for rural youth in reentry. So first, juvenile justice agencies should take the lead in establishing clearly defined partnerships with a variety of organizations and stakeholders, but with a specific focus on educational institutions and businesses and vocational opportunities. Because these organizations can provide rural youth with the educational and vocational supports, they need to be successful when they reenter their rural communities.

Christine Humowitz:

Next, juvenile justice agencies should work to leverage the strong relationships already present in many rural communities. And they should use these relationships to help connect with partners who will support youth both while they're in the facility and in reentry. And then after reentry, when they're back in their home communities. And then finally, juvenile justice agencies must work to maintain these relationships over time. And they must be willing to reach out to new partners when necessary to meet youth's individual unique needs.

Christine Humowitz:

Having strong partnerships with a variety of rural providers will be helpful for juvenile justice agencies when they need to reach out to new partners if they have a youth that has a need they haven't encountered before because of the strong relationships that are present in these communities. So, making sure to maintain these relationships is essential to keeping partnership networks strong and being able to expand them when needed. So, with that, if we could go to the next slide. Perfect. I will turn things over to Shay Bilchik to discuss the health and wellbeing brief in this series. And I thank you guys so much for your attention.

Shay Bilchik:

Thanks, Christine. And thanks, Brett, for a great presentation. It's great to be with everybody. I am the founder and director of Emeritus at the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and delighted to be part of this project. Our second area of focus is on health and wellbeing in the rural reentry context. Here, we once again see both the strengths and the challenges that rural communities and their system involved youth and families face. The strengths noted earlier by Michael include the pride they have in their community, their unique culture and history that they bring, the strong community connections and working relationships that we find in rural and remote areas in this country, and the strong informal support networks that have formed over time with the great stability that we often see in rural communities. And all of these are needed as foundational pieces as these communities take on the challenges, they face related to reentry in the rural context. The lack of specialized services, the distance that we see from services, the lack of transportation, and the lack of pro-social activities just to name a few.

Shay Bilchik:

So, as we get into the substance of this, health and wellbeing are a critical, important dimension to the long term positive outcomes, life outcomes for our youth. This is particularly true for system involved youth that are more likely than the general population to have mental health, substance use or co-occurring disorders. In the rural context, this becomes a critically important challenge to address due to the general lack of specialized services and a lack of positive youth development activities. When I think about these challenges that are inherent in reentry planning, I think about how we need to successfully transition youth into a placement and then back to their community. Creating a continuity, so to speak, of services and supports that the benefit they gained from that placement cannot be lost as they reenter the community. So, figuring out that continuity piece becomes critically important and is particularly challenging in and of its own right, let alone striving to connect youth to services and supports in rural communities. Next slide.

Shay Bilchik:

So, we think about this in the context of the integration that we need for the health and wellbeing with our youth facing systems. The need to create partnerships, all of these can be seen on this slide. There are a number of strategies that can be used to address these challenges in particular. This includes that integration informing these partnerships, improving accessibility and providing training and engaging in capacity building and community. If you think about the strengths inherent in the rural communities that we're talking about, we have a nice platform from which to begin this work. These are great ideas in concept, but often they're harder to achieve in reality. So, to bring these ideas to life, at least in part, I'm delighted to turn the presentation over to Dr. Christy Doyle with the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, who is the director of the Office of Behavioral Health Services in that agency. Dr. Doyle.

Dr Christy Doyle:

Thank you so much, Shay. It's a pleasure to be here with you today. And I have to say that when Michael was doing his introduction, his description of rural communities resonated strongly with me because I myself am a product of rural Georgia. I am a Georgia native and grew up in a small, small town in Southeastern Georgia on the banks of the Okefenokee Swamp. So many people think of Atlanta when they think of Georgia, but as soon as you get out of Atlanta and the farther you go, the more rural we become. Agriculture is Georgia's largest industry and over 43% of Georgia land is classified as rural. So that means a large chunk of the kids that we serve are going to be going home somewhere that is a rural setting. Next slide please.

Dr Christy Doyle:

And in Georgia DJJ, we have utilized second chance act grant support and a governor some years ago who had a strong reentry vision to build a strong office of reentry services. Because obviously we all know so well think exit at entry. Our reentry planning for children begins as soon as they are admitted. So, within 10 days of admission to our facility, they will meet what we call their youth centered reentry team. And the entire team will meet with the child, talk about what's available in the facility, talk with the child about what their goals are, and begin to develop the plan that the child will follow for all services. Education, mental health, skill building. If they need a specialty service such as substance use or sex offender treatment, all of that will be developed.

Dr Christy Doyle:

As the child gets closer and closer to their discharge, then the reentry meetings pick up in frequency. So, there is a meeting every 30 days beginning at the 120 day or six month mark. And the plans for returning the child to their community and making those connections specifically within their community. Like so many agencies, most of our long-term facilities where our most robust treatment is offered is not in the child's home community. So, making those connections back to make sure that the continuity of what the child is getting is incredibly important. So we assign a reentry specialist whose job it is to follow that child and their family for 60 days after the child's discharge to help make sure that the appointments that were set up, the transportation arrangements that were put in place, the mentor relationship that was established, the employment connection, making sure that all of those things actually happened and that the child was actually able to leverage all of the plans that were put in place for his or her reentry.

Dr Christy Doyle:

Brent mentioned a while ago the credible messenger approach. We do have credible messengers within DJJ, and we are currently developing our first peer and parent peer positions. Those are positions that are certified peer specialists specifically with lived experience in juvenile justice, but also mental health needs within juvenile justice. And I neglected to say 70% of the kids in our long-term facilities do require care on the mental health caseload. So, we know not just anecdotally, we know from our data that most of our children are going to need some sort of treatment connection or support when they return to their community. So, the addition of the credible messenger, our goal is for that to be yet another support and having folks who have experience in that local community, because every community's resources are so different. Next slide, please.

Dr Christy Doyle:

So, it takes a village, right? And in Georgia, we do have a number of formal ongoing partnerships that we can connect kids into, or that we can leverage to use kids' local resources most effectively. One of the most powerful of these is the Local Interagency Planning Team. And this is in Georgia code. It is the responsibility of our state behavioral health agency to assure that these are convened. And they are comprised of the local representatives of all state agencies in that community. So, Department of Behavioral Health is represented. We are represented. Our child welfare agency, early care and learning if that's appropriate to the child. Public health and local partners. So local providers, the local school system, any local nonprofits, any faith-based organizations that are working with kids. And the point of these LIPTs is to leverage those ground level community resources that somebody from outside, or as in South Georgia we used to say, "Those people from Atlanta," don't even know exists because they're very specific to that community.

Dr Christy Doyle:

And the LIPT also knows where additional connections can be made to assure that the child is connecting to the most available resources to which they may have access. Moving up to more of a 20,000-foot level. The state runs the Interagency Directors Team, and that is as a body in which I participate, and probably the best definition is its people at my level from all state agencies plus. So at that middle level, the people who are overseeing the actual mental health and wellness work for the state agencies, for our advocacy partners, and we'll talk a little bit more about that in our next bullet, for treatment providers, for nonprofits, again to develop state level options that can then be shared with the Local Interagency Planning Teams. And that is actually one of the functions of the Interagency Directors Team, is to provide support from that state level to the LIPTs.

Dr Christy Doyle:

And then finally we have our Child and Adolescent Health Coalition, which is a group of health and behavioral healthcare providers. Again, the same kind of mix of state agencies, nonprofits, care providers, advocates, which was convened by the advocacy organization Voices for Georgia's Children. And it is a space where we can talk about policy decisions, possible legislative options, boots on the ground, practice, innovations, share ideas, identify challenges. And since it is run through an advocacy organization, different conversations can be had there than might be had at some other organizational levels. Next slide, thank you.

Dr Christy Doyle:

In terms of local initiatives, we talk about formal groups, those in city kind of opportunities to connect children back into their community. Georgia has what we call the APEX school mental health program, which was developed by our Department of Behavioral Health. And they provide support and funding strategy support to provide mental health services directly in a child's school. And many schools have available at the elementary, middle and high school level, these are local providers who have actual offices within the school. Children can be seen during the school day. They can be seen after school hours. But again, taking the service to where the child is to help bridge some of the access gaps that Shay referred to, particularly transportation. Because in rural areas, children may live 20, 30, 40 miles away from their local provider, but if things are going well, all children are going to school. So, placing the service where the child is.

Dr Christy Doyle:

And we've also seen success with our youth clubhouse models in rural areas. And these are multidisciplinary clubhouses that include the social activities that we've referenced, mental health services, substance use treatment services. Some vocational services, there could be job coaching there. And transportation is a key part of the success of the clubhouses. Another strategy that we have used is the implementation of Federally Qualified Health Centers, FQHCs, PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:46:04]

Dr Christy Doyle:

again, directly in schools, the strategy of taking the service to the child. Some FQHCs in schools are specifically for health only and service the child's health home or can do. But some of them also include other services such as mental health services, dental services. There are one or two that actually allow for family members to be accessed through the FQHC.

Dr Christy Doyle:

So, some of you may know the name, Dr. Veda Johnson from Emory University. She is a leader in this work and very active in the Child and Adolescent Health Coalition, and has been a big driver in this work, and of course, virtual services, right? The pandemic really opened everyone's eyes and expanded the options for virtual services. So those that we hope to continue after the pandemic and continue as business as usual is it is our goal to expand specialty services that might once have required residential placement or placement of the youth in an urban setting, most usually Atlanta. If we can develop a sustainable plan to offer those services virtually, and in a way that is effective for the child, then that can keep the child at home, in their community, and connected to their local resources. Much more beneficial for the child that way.

Dr Christy Doyle:

Also, some support activities, support groups, peer groups. There's good literature out there that emerge the pandemic that virtual support groups had good traction and provided good supports to folks. And then opportunities for social activities, particularly those that might not be as available in rural communities. We've taken the opportunity to offer photography classes, book clubs, drama. We've had local universities in the Atlanta area partner to expand drama classes and projects to other facilities in rural areas. So, any opportunity that we can leverage to offer engagement through multiple platforms and to help support the child's health, mental health and wellbeing through expanded social connections is a good opportunity. So, thanks so much. Shay, back to you.

Shay Bilchik:

Sorry about that. Dr. Doyle, that's such a wonderful example of how a state agency working in conjunction with their local partners can bring to life so many of these community-based options for services and supports that are there, independent of reentry, but also can be linked into the reentry process. I think that's the beauty of what you've done through these various partnerships that you've formed.

Shay Bilchik:

So, a couple of takeaways on successful partnerships. Seeking out partnerships with organizations, agencies that focus on health and wellbeing of youth, and that is what Georgia has done and I think what other communities are doing as well, making sure that, as much as possible, those partners have the same vision and goals. And I want to comment on this, that it doesn't mean that there needs to be a complete overlay in every regard as to the vision and goals, but when it comes to the reentry and the support for reentry, services, treatment, supports, positive youth development opportunities, there needs to be a common vision that is formed around that.

Shay Bilchik:

Every organization has a different set of goals because their mission is different. But when it comes to this common area of work, we need to make sure that almost as an initial step in forming the partnership, that there is an understanding of those common vision and mission and goals, and then making sure there's the continuous communication between partners to make sure that, from the very beginning, with the alignment of the assessment of a child's strengths, the risk they might present, their needs they might present, to ongoing communication in case planning around reentry, and then an ongoing case management is essential.

Shay Bilchik:

There can be no hard handoffs when it comes to this work. There needs to be a coordinated, collaborative process of supporting and working with these young people when they go back into their communities, especially regarding their mental and behavioral health. So, with that, I'm going to move on in our presentation. Michael, kick it back over to you.

Michael Umpierre:

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Shay, and all. Thank you for your wonderful questions so far. Please keep them coming. We will be sure to address those in the Q&A portion as much as possible. So, we have reached now the third and final core area of reentry practice in the context of rural communities that we're exploring in our briefs. And that is the need for truly engaging with, empowering and partnering with the families of the young people that we serve, who are reentering rural communities.

Michael Umpierre:

We felt it was essential to lift up this dimension of the work because we know from the research and from our experiences, that our outcomes in juvenile justice are simply better when we can engage and partner with families in meaningful ways. Indeed, study after study has shown the incredible impact that family engagement and family centered approaches can have on our work, including positive youth outcomes related to academic engagement and achievement, improvements in health and wellbeing, including in the substance use context, enhanced public safety, including reductions in youth recidivism and so on and so forth.

Michael Umpierre:

In our view, the reason why we see better outcomes in this regard is fairly logical and straightforward. Namely, that families truly have extraordinary strengths and assets that they bring to the table. They know their children better than anyone else. They're the true experts on their needs and their strengths. And the bond that families maintain with their children, really, is unique, and one that serves as a powerful influence on how young people develop, how they make decisions, and how they grow. And so, for all of these reasons, including the fact that the overwhelming majority of young people that we're serving, who are placed in these facilities, ultimately will come home to their communities and to their families. And so, it really is incumbent on all of us that we're approaching our work with young people, hand-in-hand with their families in truly meaningful and holistic ways to ensure that they're fully positioned for long-term success.

Michael Umpierre:

Next slide please. So, what do we mean by family engagement? On this screen, you see one useful definition provided by The Children's Bureau, which defines family engagement as 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. Ultimately, family engagement is not about a singular program or a singular practice. It rather is a culture and a philosophy that really views and treats families as essential partners who are valued and respected.

Michael Umpierre:

Next slide, please. What does family engagement and partnership look like in practice? These are some of the dimensions that we explore in the brief. And I'm not seeing my slide advance. Let me see if ... We can have the next

slide, please. Thank you so much. These are some of the core dimensions that we elevate, particularly in the context of reentry practice those systems should be thinking about as they support young people who are returning home to rural communities. In our view, it begins with a broad definition of family.

Michael Umpierre:

Unfortunately, in many places in juvenile justice, we have stuck to a traditional definition of family that restricts the definition to those individuals who are related by blood or through marriage or adoption. And by doing that, we're really missing an opportunity to bring in the key supporters in the young person's life. So, to do the reentry work well, we need to move beyond those traditional definitions of family and really think about all of the individuals who will support the young person as part of that reentry process and going forward when they're no longer involved in the system, right?

Michael Umpierre:

So, this may include parents and guardians and siblings, of course, those folks related by blood and through marriage and adoption. But it can include folks who also are more akin to fictive kin, if you will, those mentors, those teachers, members of the clergy, family friends, other supporters. And this is really, as I mentioned earlier, I think that rural communities really have an incredible strength in this regard, but it has to start with how we set our reentry policy and practice to make sure that we really are being as inclusive as possible while, of course, maintaining a focus on keeping young people safe as well. That always has to be paramount.

Michael Umpierre:

For young people in custody, this includes and entails making sure that when young people are separated from their families, that we're maintaining those strong connections throughout the process. Right? As I mentioned at the outset, distance can be a factor, lack of transportation can be a factor. Those can be real barriers for families in rural communities. We have to find ways to overcome that. And we, in fact, do have examples from all around the country. You're going to hear from Becki in Massachusetts to talk about this a little bit more, about how they're overcoming these barriers, really flexible visitation policies in their facility that recognizes that families maintain multiple responsibilities with respect to childcare or employment or other responsibilities.

Michael Umpierre:

Thinking about providing transportation to families directly in order to be able to make it to those facilities while the young person is in custody and to be involved in those reentry planning meetings. Thinking about for when in-person visitation is not possible, how can we leverage technology and using video conferencing to support that ongoing communication? And, in fact, during the pandemic, we have seen great strides in that respect, recognizing that video conferencing piece always is second to that in-person dimension. The in-person piece always has to be our goal, but the technology can be supportive, nonetheless.

Michael Umpierre:

Family engagement in the third bullet here, it also means treating families as true partners in the decision-making processes, right? So in the context of reentry, we're thinking about, how do we put a plan together and do it in a way that's strength based, it's really elevating the strengths of families, and making sure that they're at the table to help make the decisions and to inform the way that we move forward with meeting their core needs? This also means, as part of our reentry planning and execution, that we're not just thinking about what the young person needs to do well, but we're also thinking about the direct supports that families need. This is more of a holistic approach to reentry. We know that the success of the young person is tied to the success of the family, and so we really need to be thinking about the type of direct supports that we can offer to families to make sure that their basic needs are met.

Michael Umpierre:

And then finally, as you'll hear about, thinking about partnering with families at that systemic level, so we think about ways to improve the way we operate our juvenile justice systems and our reentry processes. How can we really partner with families to inform that process? And jurisdictions, again, all across the US have done good work in this area. Massachusetts is a great example, and you'll hear from Becki, but thinking about how do you partner with families to make sure we're elevating their voices and they can help move these system transformation and improvement efforts?

Michael Umpierre:

Family advisory councils, family liaisons are specialists that can provide this insight, thinking about ways that we can elevate the voices across the board. So, with I'd love now to turn the floor over to Becki Moore, from the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, to talk about the great work that they're leading at DYS, really an agency that has embraced family engagement as a core guiding principle in their work. Becki?

Becki Moore:

Great. Thank you, Michael. Hello, everyone. I'm very pleased to be here representing Massachusetts and the work we're doing around family engagement. I'm here during Second Chance Month. I'm particularly excited about that. And I

think it's a nice segue where Michael left it in terms of empowering families to be real agents in transforming systems. Next slide, please.

Becki Moore:

We've had that opportunity. We've been very fortunate over the last several years, excuse me, to have created a family advisory council through our OJJDP Second Chance Act grant funds. We had a vision to create this council, to do just that in terms of bringing families to the table as partners, as genuine partners, to lift their voices, to hear from those most impacted by the decisions that we make. To echo what Michael said, to hear from the true experts. They are the experts in their children, to provide an opportunity to bring them to the table in a deliberate way and in a meaningful way, because we too agree that doing this, I think Michael said, outcomes are simply better. We believe that as well, and we believe that it's needed to best position the young person for success in reentry.

Becki Moore:

So, we did create the family advisory council, first in our Metro Boston region. We have five regions at DYS. We developed it with a vision to lift those voices and inform practice within the department, particularly aimed at increasing supports for families with a focus on increased housing stability and then the ability to enhance the effective use of kinship placement. So, it's interesting Michael mentioned that definition of family and that we really embrace broad defining what family looks like and who are we, really, to make that definition? So, we did develop, through our Second Chance Act grants, we're able to work on developing a policy, and all of our policies are public and available at mass.gov.

Becki Moore:

We have a policy that moved us away from kinship and we call it a non-guardian placement policy, which does allow a path for young people committed to DYS to be placed to live with those supportive networks, whomever they may be. It could be blood relatives, relatives through adoption, it could be various family relationships, but also giving a pathway for connections and the ability to be placed with other folks in that supportive network, folks like Michael mentioned, family friends, auntie, neighbor, someone who's been supportive to that young person, and just allowing a path for that.

Becki Moore:

I think as we think about the challenges that families face, and as we built the family advisory council over many years now and then strived to maintain it through the onset of the pandemic, think about the challenges that are faced by families in rural communities. Many of those challenges are faced by all families, right? Many of those have been named here by my colleagues today. Distance, transportation, childcare, schedules, just whether that be through employment, work, other life commitments, right? So, trying to get ahead of those challenges.

Becki Moore:

Technology is certainly one. I'm going to talk a little bit more about that in just moment, how that did keep, certainly, the family advisory council work moving through the pandemic. We were able to do that with leveraging technology, and it also has supported some of our expansion, which is a nice segue into the strategic focus under our grant award that we did want to replicate the work that we've created in our Boston area, through the creation of the family advisory council, to be able to replicate that throughout the whole state. And it was a nice opportunity to leverage technology, to connect the people, our family members, who were committed to doing the work in the Boston area with other parts of the state without having to travel, so to leverage technology in that way.

Becki Moore:

So that is our goal, to create this family advisory space in all of our five regions. And the primary focus was to, at first, this idea that in terms of an advisory capacity for families and parents, to take a look at department policies, practice, and procedures, to get that behind-the-curtain look at the functions of the department and so that they could inform and help us further develop policies and procedures, again, keeping in mind that they and their children are most impacted by those decisions that we're making. It did lead us through the work to think about some enhancements and to check some of our own assumptions about how to best move the work forward and really listen to the families.

Becki Moore:

This has led us to begin to explore, through a procurement that will be upcoming in the fall, to employ paid parent partners that would be part-time positions. We do already provide a stipend to the families that are participating in the family advisory council, but I guess to amp that up a little bit and create a paid parent partner. We heard that the families, yes, wanted to advise on policy and have a voice around practice and procedure, and what we heard them say very loud and clear was they wanted to act in a mentor role. They wanted mentorship to be a central point to their engagement, that they felt their lived experience, they wanted to coach, support other parents, other family members through a young person's commitment to DYS.

Becki Moore:

So, we have this piece in motion right now for that procurement that is planned for fall. We actually have a stakeholder focus group as a first step toward that in the coming month. So, we have been listening to parents, and really, again, I'd say checking ourselves to this. It cannot be only what we desire or what we want. It should really be what is beneficial to the parents. So, hearing them on the idea of mentorship is the direction we're moving in. Next slide, please.

Becki Moore:

Great. So, the family engagement specialist, that comes to us. We're able to fund that position, and when I think about what was mentioned earlier about the need to have a specialized service in a rural community, and it may not be available, we at DYS created this position. So we engage with our provider partners to employ a family engagement specialist in each one of our regions, and their primary role is to increase family engagement as they work closely with our staff in identifying strategies that could be successful for family engagement, provide training opportunities and workshops, and are just really there for consultation, and also work closely with the youth and families throughout the full DYS continuum.

Becki Moore:

We really subscribe to the early-and-often idea and that families should have a deliberate space at the table at different touch points, at different decision-making points throughout a young person's commitment. The family engagement specialist accompanies our case worker on the initial home evaluation during the initial classification stage when the decision following assessment, where the young person will be placed, and then as needed through the course of the young person's commitment, so during treatment, through the reentry phase, and back home. So, they have a deliberate seat at that table.

Becki Moore:

I hear that "at the table" reference a lot with raising voices up of those affected most by decisions and giving space at a table. So, I just wanted to share a quote I heard recently. I can't attribute it to someone, so I'm sorry, and it's not my original thought. But someone said, "If you don't have a seat at the table, you're on the menu." And I thought that was really impactful. It made me pause and think that that's true, right? That if you don't have a seat, a genuine seat, you're being discussed. You're on the menu. So, I'm sharing that quote because it's been helping me and continuing to drive this work of how critical it is to have parents and families as genuine partners in the work.

Becki Moore:

So, the last thing that the family engagement specialists focus on are some of our just creative initiatives that was certainly needed through the pandemic to think about how we could stay connected to families and to youth. One of the things they support us around, the family engagement staff, is around our support of dialectical behavioral therapy, which is utilized at DYS. Through the pandemic, they were delivering baskets and resources to the doorsteps of youth and families to support DBT skill practice. They support their critical member in our family advisory councils. They are the staff lead on those councils, and they are always coming up with creative ways to engage families, particularly with a PYD focus, recreational opportunities, either with us as we build

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Becki Moore:

community, and also through us, offering tickets to an amusement park or something that just allows families to spend time together and really find that idea of community. Certainly, with the family advisory council, that is something that's paramount to that work. This pride that was mentioned earlier, right? The pride in the communities from which they come and the community that they're building, and the family engagement specialist is, I would consider our staff, coach through that work.

Becki Moore:

And lastly just around the use of technology, so as others have mentioned, this certainly rose to the surface through the pandemic, as we all tried to keep managing our operations and think about how we could keep families connected to young people and just really services in general needed to pivot and leverage technology a little bit more. We examined touchpoints within youth's commitment to increase that connectiveness using technology. Some examples there, program visits, clinical engagements through telehealth, meeting participation.

Becki Moore:

I heard Brett say, I think he said he loses his mind. I too lose my mind when I hear that someone, a young person or a family, can't get connected to the technology that they need. That it's somehow, it's not a luxury, connectiveness in this way, so the department has done similar to what I heard Brett described in getting devices, equipment in the hands of, not only our staff and programs, certainly making sure they're equipped, but our youth and families as well. That they have the technology, that we provide it for them, and we coach them through the use of it and that certainly has been something that, again, came on with the onset of the pandemic, but that we have been striving to sustain and maintain as

an established practice for the department.

Becki Moore:

And to that end, we have a policy, it is the... I'm going to read it, so I don't misquote it. "The residential visitation policy incorporating family engagement policies." Principles, excuse me. That was first effective in January of 2019 and is currently under revision to memorialize the virtual visit practices and the leveraging of technology that, again, did rise up during the pandemic. That policy has always, since its inception in 2019, has had a definition of family that too has supported the visions... Excuse me, the agency's vision that that be broadly defined and it is, in the glossary, defined as is maybe more traditional familial relationships. But also, around that the idea of supportive roles that are not the ones that are considered generally as family are also part of that definition, so that really supporting from an agency standpoint, that that definition of family needs to be broad.

Becki Moore:

The last thing I just wanted to share was an anecdote about the use of virtual visits and just as it can alleviate a lot of the barriers that we often would scratch our heads around in terms of family at the tables, for things like treatment meetings, or even at visits and say, "We know what the barriers are, the transportation, the childcare, the things we've named," and with the virtual option, just adding that to the menu of options, and I would echo what Michael said, that it's certainly primary for us to facilitate those in-person connections, but to have this as an option has proven helpful.

Becki Moore:

And I'll share that one young person shared a story that, with the ability to do the virtual visit, allowed him to see his home while he was in placement, see other members of the family who may not have been able to physically come to see him in his treatment program. And lastly, one that I just thought was interesting was he could see his family pet. So, he could see his home. He had this strong, it certainly supported a strong youth and family connectiveness, which we hope supports the young person through treatment and through that eventual reentry back into that home. So, I wanted to share that anecdote, that was a benefit that I think, I could certainly say I hadn't considered as virtual visits became more mainstream, but that was unanticipated, but also very beneficial. So wanted to share that as I close out, so thank you. I'll pass it back to Michael.

Michael Umpierre:

Thank you so much Becki, for that overview and really just a tremendous set of strategies that are being implemented in Massachusetts and I hope folks were taking notes and thinking about the types of approaches that can be implemented in your own respective jurisdictions. Again, for us, when it comes to family engagement, it's not necessarily a singular practice, but rather a really relentless pursuit to view and treat families with respect and as valued partners in this endeavor.

Michael Umpierre:

So, thinking about your reentry of practice, in the context of those young people returning to rural communities, is an opportunity to examine your policies, your practices, the way that your staff interact with and communicate with families and, hopefully doing it in a strength based way. We understand that many barriers stand in the way of ongoing family engagement. We have heard across the country that many families may have a historical distrust of the system, which can stand in the way of this work, practical barriers around transportation and navigating multiple responsibilities can stand in the way of the work for some families.

Michael Umpierre:

I mean, I can tell you as a former public defender, where I represented young people, a stay in a facility was viewed as a respite or a break, but for us, as juvenile justice practitioners and partners, we must never give up hope on engaging those families. We may not be able to engage every family at every point in time, but given what we know about the benefits and the outcomes that result as a part of this approach, of really partnering with and empowering families, it's worth all of our efforts to go down this road, and I think that the conversation here has really illuminated how we might get there.

Michael Umpierre:

So on the next slide, I'd like to quickly just close this out for this portion of it so we can get to the Q&A, and I want to thank everybody for your questions again, but I hope that you've been able to see that throughout each of these three areas that we've explored today and are at the focus of our briefs, that partnerships across the board really are a central theme. In order to do this work well, with respect to reentry, we have to be thinking about engaging the full array of partners and stakeholders who can inform the path forward for young people reentering rural communities and connect them to the types of services and supports that they need as well as their family members.

Michael Umpierre:

So today we've talked a lot about educational and vocational partners and that health dimension, including medical and

behavioral health providers as well and young people and families directly themselves, but of course it's much broader than that. We think that the rural communities have incredible strengths that they can leverage and really thinking about that broad array of partners to bring in.

Michael Umpierre:

So with that, I want to turn us to, in the remaining 12 minutes that we have, to questions that have come in, and I want to start with a question that I think was initially directed to Dr. Doyle, but I would love for others to jump in as well, maybe Brett in particular, given your role Brett, would be interested in addressing this question. But the question was, just tell us a little bit more about who makes up the reentry team in your agency, as you think about young people who are returning home, who are in the facility and you're putting together the team of individuals to support the reentry process, who's there? What disciplines do they represent? Tell us a little bit about who makes up the reentry team and Dr. Doyle, I don't know if you want to start since it was directed to you, and then we can turn to Brett and Becki if they want to jump in.

Dr Christy Doyle:

Yeah, thanks Michael, certainly. Our reentry team has obviously the usual facility suspects, the mental health provider for the child, the psychologist, the psychiatrist or a nurse representing the psychiatrist or education, the risk reduction case manager and then members of our office of reentry services are also there from the community. We invite, obviously, the parent or caregiver, and as the child moves closer to discharge, then community partners are also invited. That might be the educational institution. We offer partnerships with technical schools and universities while kids are detained and they often transition out to attend in person once they go back home, so representatives from the schools might attend, the guidance counselors or career counselors.

Dr Christy Doyle:

Employers, our office of reentry services has a lot of employment opportunities lined up all over the state for kids and the employer may often participate, especially as the kid is closer, providers. If the child has a mental health provider in the community, they might be invited to participate. Peers, Incredible Messengers may invite to participate, so we try very hard drawing community members... Mentors, oh gosh, how could I forget that? Mentors really need that seat at the table as well, if a child's been connected with one, so we try and really make the team the bridge between community and facility as the child prepares to go home.

Michael Umpierre:

Thank you, Christy and Brett, I want to turn to you just to follow up on that, in terms of your team composition when it comes to reentry, and also add on another question that's come through, which is, if I'm an organization... Now I'm reading between the lines on the question, but say I'm a community-based organization, or a community based provider and I want to get involved in the reentry process, how do I go about doing that? So, two part question for you, Brett. If you want to share your team composition with respect to reentry and how do you engage with community-based organizations or providers who want to support the young people as they reenter the community?

Brett Peterson:

Yeah, to the first part of the question, mine's very similar to what Christy described. A child and family team that's composed really from day one, and then just starting to tack on the different pieces as that youth's moving closer to reentry and making sure that transition plan is solid, but it's going to have all those same core components. But ultimately, trying to create an environment where it's youth and family led. It's led by youth voice, driven by youth voice and family voice and choice, so that could end up resulting in a lot of different people at the table but that's the core.

Brett Peterson:

To the part of how do you get involved as a community organization? I mean, I think there's the more formal traditional ways of whatever jurisdiction you're in looking at the different procurement websites, whatever the state uses, the federal components as well, and seeing what types of services the agencies are trying to procure. So, they might be specifically looking to get a contract for mentors for example or Incredible Messengers.

Brett Peterson:

Then, one thing I think is sometimes challenging and I don't know the right answer to it, is, for example, we'll have a lot of community partners that really want to engage, and they want to give back and be involved with our young people. But then, as we start moving towards... Say we want something a little more formal, we might have these organic efforts going, and then we're like, "Okay, we now have all these rules we have to abide by. We want to pay folks to do this work that are coming in," like Incredible Messenger is a good example, "we want to pay folks, but we ultimately have to put that out for procurement."

Brett Peterson:

So, we might get a different organization that comes in and gets that contract, versus those who were already building some of those relationships. If you're looking from more of a business perspective, it's going to have to go through those procurement pathways. If it's looking for something more organic, it's just going to start with a conversation with your local or state-run juvenile facility and say, "Hey, we want to work with young people. We have mentors or we have different contacts for them." That's where it would start.

Michael Umpierre:

Thank you for that, Brett, and Becki, I want to turn to you. A couple of questions, one just as a follow up to your overview of the family advisory council. One individual here is interested in how you go about recruiting the members as part of that council, so that's the first part of the question. And we got another question around preparing families for the return of their young person back home, and particularly where you may have, as the person who asked the question, a toxic home environment. How do you go about addressing that while the young person is in the facility to be able to have a seamless transition back home? So, two part question, if you could talk a little bit about how you recruit members of the council and how you think about focusing on the home environment while the younger person is in care.

Becki Moore:

Sure. Well, I'll address the recruitment piece first and we'll say that is fluid, ever changing and is different, particularly as we have our eye where we anticipate it being different and needing to be fluid as we do expand statewide. What I can speak to with our initial creation of the family advisory council in our Metro Boston region was an initial involvement in other services and initiatives that our family engagement specialist was spearheading. So, things like parent cafe, parenting journey, other opportunities that we had these forums and places, again, where families came together with lived experience to build community, to build on community that existed just from where they live, and then build that community from within those parent cafe groups. From there would come the recruitment for the family advisory council.

Becki Moore:

Where we've also seen some opportunity in that our case workers, the primary agents for our agency, have small caseloads. There's a lot of intense contact with families, particularly through initial commitment and involvement at different touch points with them, and with that family engagement specialist working in partnership with them, to put those opportunities in front of them. So, whether they want to be involved in the family advisory council or in one of those other, I don't want to call them prerequisites because they're not necessary to become members of the family advisory council, but they tend to be the places where interest is peaked and where that recruitment happens. But that is evolving as we expand.

Becki Moore:

I would say it's the relationships with the case workers and then the other opportunities that the family engagement specialist is facilitating where the interest gets peaked. And I'm excited to see how the mentorship angle could also lead to recruitment and because the parents want that, we want to make that happen and I do see that as another place where recruitment would happen.

Becki Moore:

The second one was certainly, the return to toxic families. Gosh, that's a big one, right? Because we do recognize that, that some young people we're working with don't really have identified family, don't want to return to their families. We also, in Massachusetts, you're committed, it's an age determination so until either 18 or 21. And we have a voluntary service, which by statute, young people committed to DYS can sign on voluntarily to continue to receive services up until their 22nd birthday. So, we do work with a lot, and to add, our average age of commitment, I think at this point, I think it's over 17 years old. 17 and a half, so we are dealing with an older population and the young person may choose not to go home to family as they're not a minor.

Becki Moore:

We were fortunate in the residential treatment phase at DYS that there are in-house clinicians, that clinical team. Family therapy is happening, or at least is trying to happen if there's that level of engagement there, so that's a lot of the pre-work done during placement and then through transition for that reentry to family. But sometimes, by choice by the young person or just because it's not the best supportive environment, the young person may not go back to that identified family, which is where options like our non-guardian placement option can come into play. We also, just in the last couple years, have expanded our in-house capacity for independent living options for young people, which scattered apartment model. So young people able to live in their own apartments and we have staff supporting their reentry and transition. Those are some of the things top of mind in terms of that return to families, when it's just maybe not an ideal, which is how I'm interpreting toxic, is not an ideal placement for the young person.

Michael Umpierre:

Thank you so much and I know that we're just about at the top of the hour, but the older population was a theme present in these questions, about how do we support them around their housing, around meeting their needs, and so in 30 seconds or less, Dr. Doyle or Brett, I want to bring you in here. What can you say about thinking about the older population in the reentry context? How can we support that population?

Brett Peterson:

That's why we've put so much effort into higher education and legitimate top paying vocational efforts because I can't place a 19-year-old, have them go start at McDonald's. I can, but it's going to be much better for them if we can help them get some of those competencies, they're going to help them really to integrate back in at that older age.

Brett Peterson:

I do think there are advantages sometimes with the older population, every state's different, but the way here in Utah, the way our adult Medicare works, versus those kids who are carved out under the foster care Medicaid, there are some advantages, like some easier supports for us to get sometimes when they're over 18. But yeah, so I think it's just thinking that way, just shifting the mindset to what makes sense for someone who's 19, 20, 21 and thinking too, how was it for most of us when we were 21, or 20? We were out, we were doing our thing, but we still needed some of those touch points, so I love the voluntary services. I think those are really critical, things like that.

Michael Umpierre:

Thank you so much. Last word, Christy.

Dr Christy Doyle:

I was going to say, similar to Brett, we focus really on trying to connect with serious education and real employment with career paths and companies that offer robust opportunities. It's interesting that Brett said that they focus more on the adult Medicaid. We are actually in the process of trying to amend our Medicaid state plan to allow DJJ involved kids to retain their child Medicaid status up to the age of 21, which is where commitment to us ends. Since that does allow them to transition directly to some service connections that we have not been able to leverage adult Medicaid for. So yeah, it appears that different strategies can be leveraged effectively in both systems.

Michael Umpierre:

Absolutely. Well, on behalf of our entire team, I want to thank our wonderful presenters today, and especially thank our partners at AIR and OJJDP and BJA for supporting Second Chance Month. This is really terrific and to have the opportunity to talk with well over 200 attendees of this webinar is fantastic. Here is our contact information. Please follow up. We will be sure to be in touch with you as these briefs are released to the field. If we, at the center, can be of service to your efforts in any way, please don't hesitate to reach out. As you'll see in the chat, please take a moment if you will, to provide feedback on today's event using the link that has placed in the chat. Again, on behalf of our team, thank you so much for being with us today.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:31:50]

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