Reducing Recidivism for Youth in the Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services
Analyses and Recommendations
Josh Weber, Juvenile Justice Program Director
October 27, 2015

The Council Of State Governments Justice Center

National nonprofit, nonpartisan membership association of state government officials
Represents all three branches of state government
Provides practical advice informed by the best available evidence
Assessment of Policies and Practices
Youth Served by the Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services (JJS)

No juvenile justice system has fully implemented all or even most of "what works" to reduce recidivism.

JJS has engaged in a robust and transparent evaluation of its efforts and is committed to improvement.

- Reviewed JJS policies and procedures
- Analyzed recidivism and other outcome data
- Conducted over 25 focus groups with JJS staff and external stakeholders
- Identified key barriers to reducing recidivism and recommendations for improvement

High Recidivism Rates for Youth in Long-Term JJS Custody

51% of youth in private residential placements
52% of youth in secure facilities

Receive new misdemeanor or felony charges within one year of release

FIGURE 1: New Charges for Youth Released from Private Residential Placements and Secure Facilities by Assessed Risk Level, 2014
Recidivism Also a Concern for Early Intervention Programs

19% of youth in diversion programs

20% of youth in work camps

Receive new misdemeanor or felony charges within 90 days of release

Steps Taken Towards Adopting and Implementing Best Practices

Principle 1: Use Validated Assessments

- Validated risk screening and assessment tools used statewide
- Established standard case planning tool based on youth’s assessed risks/needs
- Uses Court and Agencies’ Record Exchange system to track assessments
- Conducts fidelity audits of assessments
The Majority of Youth in JJS Long-Term Custody Are Assessed as High-Risk of Reoffending

Risk screening and assessment tools used by Juvenile Court to guide intake and dispositions

**FIGURE 3**: Assessed Risk Level of Youth Admitted to Private Residential Placements and Secure Facilities, 2014

- Private Residential Placements:
  - Low Risk: 5%
  - Moderate Risk: 21%
  - High Risk: 74%

- Secure Facilities:
  - Low Risk: 1%
  - Moderate Risk: 22%
  - High Risk: 77%

A High Proportion of Youth in Early Intervention Programs Are Low/Moderate Risk to Reoffend

**FIGURE 4**: Assessed Risk Level of Youth Discharged from Diversion Programs and Admitted to Work Camp Programs, 2014

- Diversion:
  - Low Risk: 37%
  - Moderate Risk: 42%
  - High Risk: 21%

- Work Camps:
  - Low Risk: 33%
  - Moderate Risk: 33%
  - High Risk: 11%

- Judicial discretion, rather than risk assessments, are generally used to determine eligibility for diversion or work camp programs.

$7 million per year spent on diversion and work camp programs
Majority of Youth Admitted to Detention Not Due to Felony Offenses

FIGURE 5: Most Recent Offense Prior to Detention Admission, 2014

- 47% Misdemeanor
- 43% Contempt, Status, and Infractions
- 10% Felony

- Juvenile Court/JJS lack a risk screening tool to make objective detention decisions

$21 million per year spent on detention

$340 average daily cost per youth in detention, 3x more than the average daily cost ($108) for JJS diversion programs

Lengths of Stay in Facilities Are Not Based on the Time Needed for Effective Treatment and Efficient Use of Resources

FIGURE 6: Average Secure and Private Facility Custody Days by Youth’s Assessed Risk Level, 2014

- Secure Facilities
- Private Facilities

- Lengths of stay are generally longer than needed to provide effective treatment (approximately 4-8 months)
- Release decisions are based on subjective ratings of progress
- Youth with a lower risk to offend are staying longer
Steps Taken Towards Adopting Effective Programs and Evaluating Youth Outcomes

**Principle 2: Programs that Work**

- Improvement efforts to implement EBPs in secure facilities
- Transition coordinators broker reentry services and supports
- Partners with University of Utah to assess services using the Correctional Program Checklist
- Robust capacity to collect/analyze data

### Youth’s Treatment Needs Are Not Assessed Fully or in an Efficient Manner

**Insufficient Communication**

Youth receive a mental health screen but JJS staff don’t routinely share the results with the Court

**Lack of Formal Assessments**

Juvenile Court does not employ validated behavioral health assessments

**Reliance on Residential Placement**

Youth are placed in Observation and Assessment Centers for 45 days for the sole purpose of assessment

**$6.6 million** per year spent on Observation and Assessment

**$11,395** average cost per youth at O&A, up to 50x times more than the cost of in-depth validated assessment in the community
Lack of Evidence Based Treatment Models Used in Residential Placements

Secure Facilities
- Few evidence-based cognitive behavioral programs
- Few evidence-based substance use programs
- Limited mental health services
- Lack of vocational training and certification programs

Private Residential Placements
- No specific contractual requirements to establish/document:
  - Program model based on "what works"
  - Measureable treatment goals
  - Average LOS needed to achieve treatment goals

Few Evidence Based Services Are Available to Youth in the Community

- Youth at Risk of Residential Placement
- Mental Health
- Substance Use
- Youth Who Commit Sex Offenses
- Rural Communities

- Utah is not one of 35 states to implement the “big 3” EBPs (MST, FFT, MTFC) at scale statewide
- Probation reports limited services to keep higher-risk youth in community
- JJS contracts for minimal formal aftercare services for youth leaving residential placements

40% of recidivism events that occur in the year after youth are released from residential placement occur within the first 3 months
Steps Taken Toward Government Agency and Service System Collaboration

**Principle 3: Collaboration across Systems**

- Partners with the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice and Utah Board of Juvenile Justice
- Department of Human Services received System of Care funding from SAMSHA
- Partners with local school districts to provide high quality education
- Multiagency case staffing meetings occur with probation in all court districts

---

Limited Availability of Mental Health and Substance Use Services

- Youth don't receive timely or effective assessments and treatment
- Medicaid funding is essential to access services
- Limited Medicaid eligibility for evidence-based community services
- Few behavioral health services are available in the community, particularly in rural areas
- Many local mental health authorities are reluctant to work with justice-involved youth
- System partnerships and statewide coordination are limited
Steps Taken Toward a Developmentally-Appropriate Approach

**Principle 4: Policies and Practices Developmentally Appropriate**

- Case managers engage youth and families in case planning/treatment
- Case managers focused on promoting positive behaviors and trained in EBPs
- Guided by philosophy of balanced and restorative justice, which includes restitution, community service, and victim mediation

High Reliance on Residential Placement as a Response to Contempt Offenses

**FIGURE 8: Most Recent Offense Type Prior to Admission to JJS Residential Placements, 2014**

- The Juvenile Court and JJS lack a statewide graduated response matrix (in progress)
- Detention is used as a post-disposition sanction despite no research on its effectiveness and its significant expense
Key Recommendations
High Recidivism Rates but Significant Opportunities for Improvement

1. Reduce reliance on expensive residential placements and reallocate resources into community-based, evidence-based programs.

2. Use objective criteria to improve the efficiency of key supervision decisions.

3. Require the use of evidence-based programs in facilities, and hold staff/providers accountable for improved youth outcomes.

Reallocate Resources into Evidence-Based Community Services

1. Consider how $36 million spent on O&A, diversion and work camp programs, and private residential placements can be most efficiently allocated to:
   A. Assess and address youth’s mental health and substance use treatment needs
   B. Expand the use of evidence-based programs that can be used as alternatives to placement for youth at risk of JJS custody and at-risk of a probation violation.
   C. Expand the use of the CPC to all residential placements

2. Reinvest potential savings from reduced residential placements in evidence-based, community-based services

3. Amend the state Medicaid plan to cover evidence-based, community-based behavioral health services
Use Objective Criteria to Improve Supervision and Service Decisions

1. JJS and Juvenile Court should partner to establish a detention risk screening instrument and divert youth who are low-risk to reoffend and not a flight risk
2. JJS and Juvenile Court should partner to restrict the use of detention for status offenders and youth who commit technical violations
3. Revise facility LOS policies and release criteria to base these decisions on offenses, risk level, and treatment progress
4. Develop a statewide graduated response matrix, with residential placements curtailed as commonly-used response

Establish Evidence-Based Program Models for All Secure Facilities and Community Placements

1. Identify specific evidence-based programs for use in secure facilities
2. Revamp private residential provider contracts to require the use of evidence-based programs
3. Use CPC to evaluate service quality of all providers and maintain contracts with only those rated “highly effective”