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Sponsor: New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission

Research on Day Reporting Centers, Analysis of Juvenile Recidivism Patterns: A Preliminary Study

This project is to conduct a process and outcome evaluation for the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission of newly day reporting centers for juvenile parolees. We will track parolees assigned to the day reporting centers for six months to record new arrests and parole violations. We will also track control groups of parolees in the previous year in the same counties and parolees in the same time period in other counties for purposes of comparison group analysis. We will in addition interview the operators of the day reporting centers about the content and operation of their program.

Evaluation of Family-Oriented Juvenile Reentry Programs in New Jersey

One of the most widely discussed innovative programs in criminal justice in recent years has been the program developed by La Bodega de la Familia, now part of the national organization Family Justice, to deal with the problems of serious and chronic adult offenders with severe problems of drug abuse by working through their family support networks. The demonstrated success of what is now known as the Bodega Model in working with a notoriously difficult population to produce lower rates of drug abuse and recidivism has led to calls from many national experts for efforts to replicate and adapt this approach.

New Jersey's Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee and Juvenile Justice Commission are undertaking such an effort to serve individuals leaving placement in juvenile facilities. This is a very different population than that served by the original intervention on which this effort is based. The logic of the replication is strong, for there is every reason to think that this younger population, having fewer years of serious involvement in crime and drug abuse and of separation from families and communities, should be highly amenable to this intervention. Yet, the very differences in the population served and the organizational infrastructure delivering the services also mean that rigorous evaluation taking account of these differences be conducted. This proposal is designed for that task.

Several bodies of selected literature have been reviewed to establish the criteria for the needed evaluation. These include studies of the distinctive characteristics and needs of the juvenile reentry population, current debates over the structure and function of parole supervision, the techniques and findings of the original Bodega Model evaluation on which the current evaluation design is based, and the special requirements presented by evaluations of interventions that target change at the levels of individuals and community systems.

The goals and objectives of the evaluation are to conduct appropriate process and outcome evaluations. The process evaluation is designed to assess two of the stated system-level change strategies of this initiative: the enhancement of existing agency approaches to incorporate the Bodega Model, and the development of broad-based community partnerships linking family-based social support networks to relevant juvenile justice and social service agencies. The outcome evaluation is designed to assess the intermediate goal of the initiative, changes in family functioning, and the longer-term goal, reduced recidivism.

Research hypotheses for the process evaluation are that program partners will have to develop (a) specific working definitions of "family," (b) recruitment procedures that produce a clientele of as-yet-undetermined characteristics, and (c) mutually agreed upon interim outcomes. The results of these processes of program implementation cannot be known in advance, but they can be accurately documented by evaluators, working in partnership with the other program partners.

Research hypotheses for the recidivism portion of the study are premised on the assumption that relatively small numbers of clients will have participated in the program for long enough to report recidivism outcomes at the end of the first year. However, systems can be put in place during the first year to allow for rigorous analyses of recidivism during the following year. Various characteristics and associations of the intervention and comparison group samples are predicted, including an association between longer periods of participation and lower rates of recidivism.

The process evaluation will be based on interviews and observations with staff, youthful clients and their family members, representatives of agencies coming in as community partners, and community experts with a perspective on the particular characteristics of these local communities. Informed consent and other procedures for the protection of human subjects will be used throughout, subject to review and approval by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board.

The recidivism evaluation, during the first year, will involve construction of an overall database on individuals entering the programs and also members of three separate quasi-experimental comparison groups. Two of these comparison group samples are already being constructed by this evaluation team in connection with a separate evaluation of the JJC's new Day Reporting centers. The use of multiple comparison groups is intended to overcome the threats to validity involved in any quasi-experimental outcome evaluation. Recidivism indicators will include technical violations of probation and parole, new arrests as juveniles, new arrests as adults, and time to failure for any of these types of failure. Appropriate statistical techniques will be used to compare recidivism outcomes between the intervention and comparison samples, including Kaplan-Meier and Cox regression procedures to analyze time to failure for censored samples.

The research team is highly qualified and experienced for this study, with expertise in several relevant areas and direct experience working with the JJC and in evaluation of the Bodega Model itself.