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## The Lancaster County Juvenile Reentry Project - Follow-up Report

Anne M. Hobbs

*University of Nebraska at Omaha, ahobbs@unomaha.edu*

Sommer Fousek

*University of Nebraska at Omaha, sfousek@unomaha.edu*

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JUVENILE JUSTICE INSTITUTE

# THE LANCASTER COUNTY JUVENILE REENTRY PROJECT

Follow-up Report

July 2015

Anne Hobbs, J.D., Ph.D.

Sommer Fousek



## Executive Summary

In 2011, Lancaster County received a planning grant under the Second Chance Act administered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Using these funds, a team of stakeholders examined the limited reentry services available to juveniles who return to Lancaster County after a stay in a Nebraska Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC).

The following year, Lancaster County officials brought together multiple agencies to develop a systematic juvenile reentry approach, which subsequently became known as the Lancaster County Juvenile Reentry Project. From January 1, 2013 to June 30, 2015, a total of 126 youth were served under the Reentry Project.

Of these, 45 (35.7%) were young women who were returning from YRTC-Geneva and 81 (64.3%) were young men returning from YRTC-Kearney. The majority were youth of color (62.7%), which is consistent with research that demonstrates minority overrepresentation in detention facilities in Nebraska. On average, youth were a little older than 16 when they entered the Reentry Program.

The University of Nebraska Omaha's Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) was hired to evaluate the success of the program. To examine the overall effectiveness of the Reentry Project, the stakeholders agreed to measure revocations (youth sent back to the facility after having been released and served under the program) and recidivism (new law violations filed after participating in the program).

In order to determine whether the Reentry Project had an impact on the youth served, JJI used a comparison group of 150 youth who returned to Lancaster County between 2007 and 2012. Because the Reentry Project had not yet been established, those youth did not receive any of the reentry services. (A description of the control group can be found in the Appendix).

We first examined all reentry services compared to the control group. Overall, the Reentry Project was very effective for youth when *all* of the various program elements were taken into account. This supports Antchuler and Bilchek's (2014) theory that reentry programs are *most effective* when they contain six functions, or components, operating in concert with one another.

We then tested Antchuler and Bilchek's (2014) theory and compared the separate components of the Reentry Project (education specialist, mentoring, public defender, family support, aggression replacement therapy) to see if a specific program had a significant impact on reducing recidivism after reentry.

Age was the most consistently significant characteristic that influenced whether additional charges would be filed. That is, the older the youth, the more likely he or she was to have subsequent charges filed. Awareness of this should allow programs in Lancaster County to devote extra attention to older youth returning to the community, and to examine particular factors that may be influencing this outcome.



## Introduction

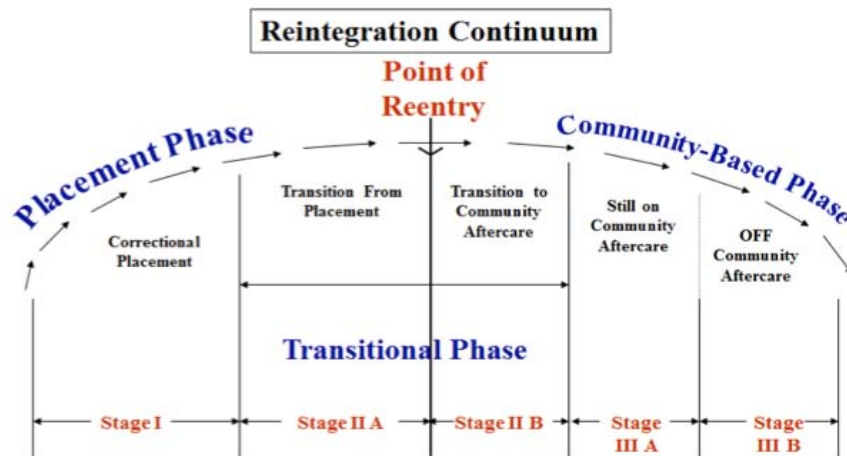
Researchers in the field of juvenile justice, mental health, and education have advocated that youth transitioning back to communities have extensive supportive and rehabilitative services (Abrams, Shannon, & Sangalang, 2008). This programming extends well beyond traditional monitoring and check-ins associated with juvenile probation services. (Abrams & Snyder, 2010; Anthony et al., 2010)

Timing is also critical; the reentry process doesn't start once the youth is released from placement. Instead, "best practices recognize that reentry begins at the time of admission to an out-of-home placement and continues beyond the youth's release and reintegration into the community." (Altschuler & Bilchik, 2014)

Altschuler (2013) outlined this same continuum when he trained Lancaster County professionals. As depicted in Figure 1, the reentry continuum consists of roughly five stages across three placement phases. (Altschuler & Bilchik, 2014) The three phases include:

- 1) The youth's time in the facility;
- 2) The youth's transition out of the facility and into the community; and
- 3) After the youth has returned to the community.

FIGURE 1.



Clearly there is overlap among the three phases. Each point of reentry poses its own challenges and requires services to effectively offset those challenges. For example, in the facility youth struggle with missing their families, working their programs, and dealing with other youth in the facility. Youth may vacillate between motivation, frustration, and stagnation. As youth transition, they may encounter problems such as difficulty securing a job, housing, and transportation, conflict with families, and issues re-entering school. (Abrams et al., 2008)

The Council for State Governments, among other reentry experts, acknowledge that the first step to developing a reentry initiative is getting the appropriate agencies to the table and eliciting a commitment to work together on a particular aspect of the issue. Altschuler (2013) also

identified that multi-agency collaboration is a critical element of successful reentry after detention. However, without coordination, multi-agency involvement can overwhelm the youth and family with contacts and services. (Council for State Government, Justice Center, 2013)

Beginning in 2012, Lancaster County brought multiple agencies together during the planning phase of the Lancaster County Juvenile Reentry Project (Reentry Project). Lancaster County also hired an individual to assist in service planning and coordination. The services provided by each agency are briefly described below; these services are examined in detail in The Lancaster County Juvenile Reentry Project Final Report (specifically the Lancaster County Reentry Matrix).

During the first year of the planning grant received under the OJJDP's Second Chance Act, providers planned for the reentry services that would be provided as part of the Reentry Project. Part of this planning process involved studying youth returning to Lancaster County from the Nebraska Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTC) in Geneva and Kearney (see Appendix for pilot study). The subsequent planning period involved development of the planned reentry services.

### **Services Provided**

Altschuler & Bilchik (2014) found that reentry programs that include “six functions operating in tandem best exemplify broad, evidence-based programming.” These six elements include:

1. Assessment of Risk for Reoffending, Strengths, and Needs
2. Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions
3. Family Engagement
4. Release Readiness
5. Permanency Planning
6. Staffing and Workforce Competencies

Using an approach similar to the multi-dimensional method proposed by Altschuler & Bilchik, (2014), Lancaster County signed Memorandums of Understanding for reentry services for the following:

1. [Assessing Risk] The Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Probation Administration were responsible for supervising youth reentering the community. Both utilize the Youth Level Services/Case Management Inventory to assess youth's risk of reoffending, so this was not a service that Lancaster County needed to contract. However, that tool does not assess youth strengths.
2. [Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions] Lancaster County contracted with a local non-profit to provide Aggression Replacement Therapy.
3. [Family Engagement] Lancaster County contracted with Families Inspiring Families, a family run, family-focused organization. The agency operates from a belief that families can encourage other families through advocacy and positive communication. With reassurance and assistance, families are able to handle their own team meetings, better

understand the system, and deal with their current situations. A family advocate (who was also a parent who had a child committed to a Nebraska YRTC in the past) reached out to each family who had a youth reentering the community.

4. [Release Readiness] Lancaster County directed a great deal of effort toward release readiness, modeling the Council for State Government's (2014) description of "unprecedented partnership between San Francisco Juvenile Probation, the Public Defender, the Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice" and the courts, for youth returning from long-term commitments.

Two transition specialists were hired through The HUB. The specialists worked closely with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, including juvenile services case workers and juvenile probation officers. The role of the transition specialists was to ensure that youth had a reentry plan in place *before* they returned to their home communities.

An education specialist was hired through Lincoln Public Schools to assist an already existing position. The role of the education specialist was to ensure there was an education plan and school placement available as youth transitioned back to the community. Ideally, youth completed all paperwork during furlough so they could be back in class within a day or two of return. The education specialists also provided ongoing monitoring to determine whether youth were attending classes and/or struggling with reentry to the Lincoln Public Schools System.

In 2014, the Reentry Project added a public defender to the team. This individual met with youth and often advocated for the services that they needed in order to receive the appropriate level of care.

5. [Permanency Planning] Permanency planning for reentry youth "takes into account their future beyond the period of placement, and as they leave adolescence and enter early adulthood, when connections to pro-social adults and peers and a sense of belonging to a positive community are key." (Altschuler & Bilchik, 2014)

The Reentry Project achieved this element through mentoring. Mentors were available through the University of Nebraska and Heartland Big Brothers Big Sisters. Youth who indicated a desire to have a mentor were matched with an individual who provided ongoing support across multiple dimensions (social, academic, employment). The goal of the mentoring program was to assist with the transition back to the community and to serve as an ongoing prosocial relationship.

6. [Staffing and Workforce Competencies] Experts also indicate that employment and workforce competencies are critical to successful reentry. Lancaster County contracted with the HUB's Project Hire to help youth develop employment readiness.

"Although there is no one right way to implement these critical elements, evidence-based programming that incorporates *all* six elements operating in tandem throughout the reentry

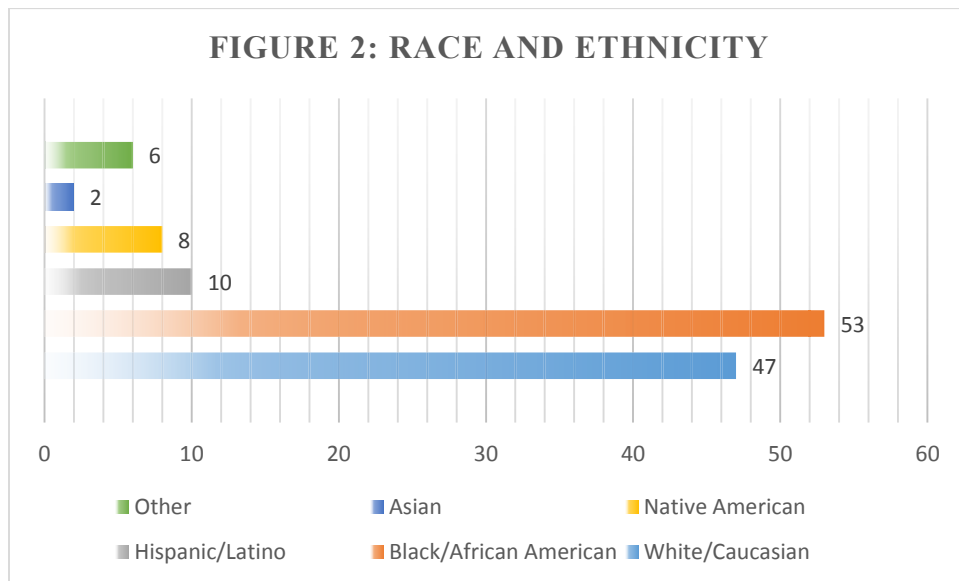
continuum have proven to be most successful in achieving positive outcomes for youth.”  
(Altschuler & Bilchik, 2014)

In the following report, we first look at the overall population of youth served. We then examine the number that received each type of service, before finally turning to our research questions.

## Total Youth Served by the Reentry Project

From January 1, 2013 to June 30, 2015, 126 youth were served under the Reentry Project. Of these, 45 (35.7%) were young women who were returning from YRTC-Geneva and 81 (64.3%) were young men returning from YRTC-Kearney. The ages of youth served ranged from 14 to 18. The average age was 16.0 years old. There was no statistical difference in the mean age between the young men (15.8 years) and women (15.7 years) served under this grant.

The majority were youth of color, which is consistent with research that demonstrates minority overrepresentation in detention facilities in Nebraska. (Hobbs, Neeley, Behrens, & Wulf-Ludden, 2012) As Figure 2 illustrates, the majority of youth were Black (42.1%), 37.3 % were White, 7.9% were Hispanic, 6.3% were Native American and 1.6% were Asian.



### Background of Youth Served

A number of factors can influence whether a youth is able to successfully reintegrate into his or her community. Some of these factors relate to the youth's immediate reentry, such as housing availability, the youth's motivation to attend school, and whether services are available. However, other factors related to reentry success include those directly linked to the youth's personal history. As the data allowed, we attempted to control for some of these factors when we examined the effectiveness of the reentry intervention. We examined the factors listed below, to explore differences within the group, before we analyzed the effectiveness of treatment.

### Age of First Placement

The age a youth is first placed outside the home and the number of out-of-home placements may be predictors of how successful the youth will be once he or she tries to reintegrate into the community. All of the youth served under this grant had experienced a prior out-of-home placement. On average, youth were 12.3 years of age when they were first placed outside the



home. Boys were slightly younger at the age of first placement (12.1 years) compared to girls (12.7 years), but the difference was not significant. On average, Hispanic and Native American youth were younger at first placement, but again, the difference was not significant.

| <b>TABLE 1: AVERAGE AGE OF THE FIRST OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT BY RACE</b> |                |                        |
|--|----------------|------------------------|
| <i>Race/Ethnicity</i>  | <i>Average</i> | <i>Number of Youth</i> |
| White/Caucasian  | 12.6           | 46                     |
| Black/African American   | 12.5           | 52                     |
| Hispanic/Latino  | 10.6           | 10                     |
| Native American  | 11.1           | 8                      |
| Asian  | 12.0           | 2                      |
| Other  | 12.5           | 6                      |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>12.3</b>    | <b>124</b>             |

### **Type of Placement**

For 49 youth (38.9% of the youth served), the Lancaster County Youth Center – Juvenile Detention Center was their first placement outside the home. Roughly 20% of the reentry youth served were placed in foster care for their first out-of-home placement. Only 10 youth (7.9%) did not have any prior out-of-home placements prior to being sent to YRTC; all 10 of these cases were commitments to YRTC-Kearney. For the remaining 116 youth, many other placements had been tried, including foster homes, group homes, and/or staying at home with a parent or relative with services.

### **Number of Prior Placements**

When we consider all changes in placement, the overall number ranged from 1 to 44 total disruptions/placements that reentry youth had experienced ( $M = 12.85$ ). For example, when a youth is on run, then placed in the detention facility, and then finally returned home, that youth has only had 1 out-of-home placement, but has experienced three disruptions or changes in placement.

When we eliminated the number of times youth were on run or subsequently returned to parents, youth experienced an average of 9.64 out-of-home placements (ranging from 1 to 33). Females experienced a statistically higher number of total disruptions than males (15.1 compared to 11.6 for males)  $p = .02$ . (Table 2).

| <b>TABLE 2: MEAN NUMBER OF PRIOR DISRUPTIONS<br/>BY GENDER</b> |              |            |                       |
|--|--------------|------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Gender</i>  | <i>Mean</i>  | <i>N</i>   | <i>Std. Deviation</i> |
| Female   | 15.09        | 45         | 9.329                 |
| Male   | 11.59        | 80         | 7.074                 |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>12.85</b> | <b>125</b> | <b>8.100</b>          |

When we consider only out-of-home placements (excluding runs and returns to parents), females still experienced a higher number of total out-of-home placements than males (11.1 compared to 8.9 for males), but it did not quite reach significance.

| <b>TABLE 3: MEAN NUMBER OF PRIOR OUT-OF-HOME<br/>PLACEMENTS BY GENDER</b> |             |            |                       |
|---|-------------|------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Gender</i>   | <i>Mean</i> | <i>N</i>   | <i>Std. Deviation</i> |
| Female  | 11.07       | 45         | 7.350                 |
| Male  | 8.84        | 80         | 5.543                 |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>9.64</b> | <b>125</b> | <b>6.316</b>          |

### **Running Away**

In the first year of the Reentry Project, we found that about 15% of the youth went on run after being released from a YRTC. This led us to examine how often youth ran prior to being placed at a YRTC. When we examined youth files, we found that 56% of the youth had run away at least one time in their histories.

## Services Provided

### Assessment of Risk Using the YLS/CMI

The Youth Level Services/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) measures relative risk across eight domains. Based on prior research, youth who score higher on the YLS are more likely to commit a new law violation, and therefore may be more likely to have their probation or parole revoked. (Betchel, Lowenkamp, & Latessa, 2007)

Youth reentering Lancaster County from a YRTC had an average score of 21, which indicates the top portion of the moderate risk range.<sup>1</sup> All youth had at least one YLS score; most had been scored on the YLS multiple times. As Tables 4-6 illustrate, there was no significant difference between males and females on their total YLS scores; nor were race, ethnicity, or age significant factors that correlated to YLS scores.

| <b>TABLE 4: AVERAGE YLS SCORE BY RACE AND ETHNICITY</b> |              |            |
|---|--------------|------------|
| <i>Race and Ethnicity</i>                               | <i>Mean</i>  | <i>N</i>   |
| White/Caucasian   | 20.98        | 47         |
| Black/African American                                  | 21.21        | 53         |
| Hispanic/Latino   | 21.60        | 10         |
| Native American   | 25.00        | 8          |
| Asian   | 26.00        | 2          |
| Other   | 25.67        | 6          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>21.68</b> | <b>126</b> |

| <b>TABLE 5: AVERAGE YLS SCORE BY AGE</b> |                 |            |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| <i>Age at Reentry Referral</i>           | <i>Mean YLS</i> | <i>N</i>   |
| 14                                       | 23.80           | 10         |
| 15                                       | 23.03           | 30         |
| 16                                       | 19.91           | 35         |
| 17                                       | 21.44           | 39         |
| 18                                       | 22.25           | 8          |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>21.64</b>    | <b>122</b> |

| <b>TABLE 6: AVERAGE YLS SCORE BY GENDER</b> |              |            |
|---|--------------|------------|
| <i>Gender</i>                               | <i>Mean</i>  | <i>N</i>   |
| Female                                      | 21.49        | 45         |
| Male  | 21.79        | 81         |
| <b>Total</b>                                | <b>21.68</b> | <b>126</b> |

<sup>1</sup> Youth are deemed low risk if they score between 0-8, moderate risk if they score between 9-22, high risk if they score between 23-34, and very high risk if they score between 35-42.

### **Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions**

Lancaster County contracted with a local nonprofit to provide Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART). Because ART was made available roughly halfway through the project, only 9 youth (7.1% of the Reentry Project population), received a referral for cognitive-behavioral interventions. Of the 9 youth referred, only 6 made it to at least one session. Records indicate that 4 of the 6 youth, or 67%, completed ART, however youth may have started the course while committed to a YRTC.

### **Family Engagement**

Lancaster County contracted with Families Inspiring Families, a family run, family-focused organization. The agency operates from a belief that families can encourage other families through advocacy and positive communication. With reassurance and assistance, families will be able to advocate for themselves.

Youth reentering their communities repeatedly struggle with “old friends and influences,” including family, peer, and gang interactions that may impact decisions to engage in substance use and violent behavior. (Abrams et al., 2008) Specific family problems have been linked to offending, including coercive parenting, neglect, and parental substance use (Trupin, 2007), as well as physical, verbal, and sexual abuse (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Youth are not likely to respond to isolated interventions that do not cater to ecological influences. Given the effectiveness of other family-based interventions (e.g., functional family therapy, brief strategic family therapy) for youth who are transitioning (Abrams & Snyder, 2010), assigning youth and their families to a family advocate to help facilitate reentry appears appropriate.

According to the most current YLS scores for youth referred to the Reentry Project, 88.1% of youth (111) scored a 2 or higher on the family circumstances domain of the YLS. Referral data for youth involved in the Reentry Project indicate that reunification with an immediate family member is not recommended or possible in 26% of the cases.

In a little more than half of the cases, the referral form recommended that Families Inspiring Families (FIF) be involved (64 cases). FIF made contact with 63 family members; the majority of the time, the mother of the reentry child was the contact. Over the course of this grant, FIF contacted the reentry families 1,565 times. Contact with families ranged from 2 to 189 interactions per family (families with more contacts were more engaged with the family advocate).

On average, family advocates were in contact with a youth and guardian 24.5 times. They generally tried to make contact via phone, however they also used email, text messaging, and in-person meetings to reach out to families. At the time of this report, FIF ceased services in all of the cases (64) because the grant had come to an end.

### *Improved Relationships*

One of the goals for the youths' long-term success was improving their relationships with their families. Although some youth started out with good relationships, others struggled. Unfortunately, there were cases where the parents refused to participate with the FIF program.

For instance, in one case the agency indicated “[We] worked with [the] family a short time when the youth was sent back to the YRTC, [the] parent said she was finished with him.”

In some cases, the relationship improved briefly while the youth was clean, only to deteriorate later. For one young man, the “relationship was better in the beginning but then deteriorated when youth started using again and went on the run.”

In a handful of cases, the parent was cooperative until the youth was released, then stopped communicating with FIF at that point. “Father no longer returned calls after youth released.”

In over 62% of the cases, it was unclear whether there was sustained improvement in family dynamics. But in 10% of the cases, the agency working with the family felt that there was clear improvement, as indicated by the following comments:

“Yes Parent was able to trust youth when she came home.”

“Yes the youth and his father communicate well and the youth listens to his fathers’ suggestions.”

“Yes they are able to communicate better [than they had].”

### **Partnership for Release Readiness**

Three community partners focused on the practical aspects of preparing the youth for release. These included the transition specialists, the education specialists, and the public defender. Each advocated for the youth’s needs upon release, but focused on different types of readiness:

- I. The transition specialists addressed the practical necessities of reentering, such as securing housing/independent living, a driver’s license, a food handler permit, etc.
- II. The education specialists focused on each youth’s educational requirements, including school enrollment, attendance, and disciplinary or academic issues.
- III. The public defender addressed the legal aspects of reentry, such as ensuring the youth had notice of court dates.

#### *Transition Specialists*

Transition specialists worked with each youth that participated in the Reentry Project. They often served as the bridge between programs, fielding calls from youth, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services case workers, juvenile probation officers, mentors, and family advocates. The goal of the transition specialists was to ensure that youth had a reentry plan in place *before* they returned to their home communities; this often involved bridging resources to meet a youth’s needs related to home, school, employment, and/or the YRTC facility.

#### *Education Specialists*

The education specialists focused on the youth’s academic needs. These two positions were in place to ensure that youth would transition back to school in a timely fashion. Ideally, youth or a guardian would complete all paperwork during furlough so that the youth could be enrolled within a few days after returning to the community. The education specialists also provided

ongoing monitoring to determine whether a youth was attending classes and/or was struggling with reentry to the Lincoln Public Schools System. However, as Table 7 illustrates, not all of the youth were enrolled in Lincoln Public Schools upon return to the community.

Overall, 21.4% of the youth involved with the Reentry Project (27 youth) received either a diploma or GED while they were being tracked by the program. Estimating the number of youth who improved attendance or GPA was more difficult, as youth would often improve for a time, then stop attending, so objective improvement was difficult to measure.

| <b>TABLE 7: YOUTH ENROLLED IN SCHOOL (n=89)</b> |    |
|---|----|
| BEST  | 1  |
| Bryan   | 6  |
| Clarinda, IA                                    | 1  |
| Lincoln East                                    | 7  |
| Lincoln High                                    | 21 |
| North Star                                      | 17 |
| Northeast                                       | 12 |
| Omaha Benson                                    | 1  |
| Omaha Northwest                                 | 1  |
| Pathfinders                                     | 3  |
| Southeast                                       | 13 |
| Southeast Transition Program                    | 0  |
| Southwest                                       | 3  |
| Uta Halle Academy                               | 1  |
| Waverly   | 1  |
| Yankee Hill                                     | 1  |

*Public Defender*

A public defender was assigned in roughly 30% of the Reentry Project cases. Because this position was not available for the first 12-15 months of the project, 37 youth did not have this option available to them.

| <b>TABLE 8: NUMBER AND PERCENT OF CASES WITH A PUBLIC DEFENDER ASSIGNED</b> |                        |                |
|---|------------------------|----------------|
|   | <i>Number of Cases</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
| No Public Defender  | 51                     | 40.5           |
| Public Defender Assigned  | 38                     | 30.2           |
| Option not Available  | 37                     | 29.4           |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>126</b>             | <b>100.0</b>   |



### Permanency Planning

The goal of the mentoring program was to assist with the transition back to the community and to provide a long-term, prosocial relationship. The mentor/youth matches began while the youth were in the YRTC facilities and were designed to continue even after the case closed, in order to enhance connections to pro-social adults and a sense of belonging to a positive community.

Mentoring services were the most common service requested on the referral form (requested 65% of the time). To participate, youth had to want a mentor; they were given the opportunity to decline.

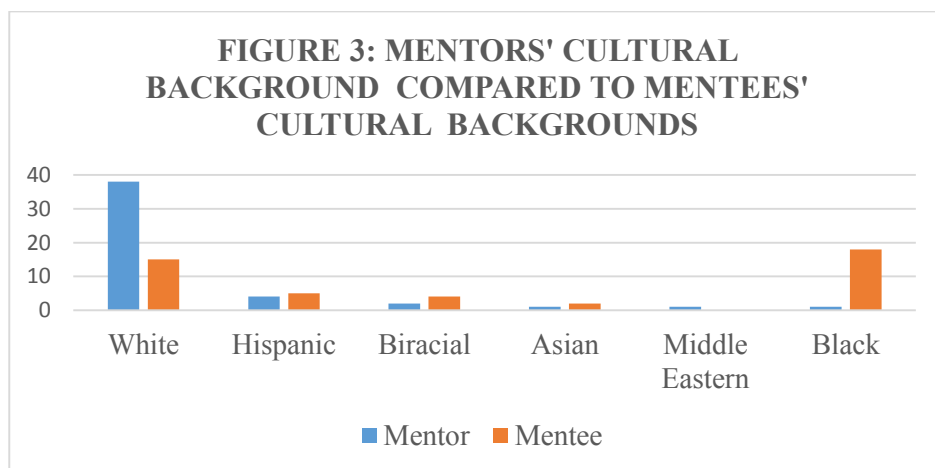
As a part of the Reentry Project, a total of 68 youth were paired with a mentor (54% of all referrals). Big Brothers Big Sisters matched 21 youth with a “Big.” The University of Nebraska matched 47 youth with a college student enrolled in a two-semester course entitled Juvenile Reentry (in the Facility and in the Community).

#### *Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS)*

The average BBBS mentor was 29.7 years old. There was an even gender split: 50% of BBBS mentors were male, while 50% were female. The racial and ethnic breakdown of BBBS mentors was 76.2% white (16 mentors), 9.5% Asian (2 mentors), 9.5% Hispanic (2 mentors), and 4.8% Black (1 mentor). At the time of this report, only 10% of BBBS matches remain open and roughly 19 of the 21 matches, or 90%, have been closed. Reasons for closure include: youth ran away, youth moved, youth had time constraints, and the youth stopped contacting the Big and BBBS. The average length of mentorship for closed matches was 192 days, or 6.4 months.

#### *University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL)*

A total of 47 youth were matched with a UNL mentor. Roughly 49% of UNL mentors were male, while 51% were female. The average age was 21.5; compared to the mentees’ average age of 15.8. UNL mentors were predominantly White students (81% or 38 mentors). Of the remaining 19%, 8.5% were Hispanic (4 mentors), 2.1% were Middle Eastern (1 mentor); 2.1% were Black (1 mentor); 2.1% were Asian (1 mentor) and 8.5% (4 mentors) were multi or biracial. As Figure 3 illustrates, there were many more White mentors than White mentees; and many more Black mentees than Black mentors. Consequently, training and coursework intentionally addressed cross-cultural communication.



Forty-seven percent of UNL matches remain open at the time of this report (22 matches). Of the 25 cases that closed, most were due to the youth ending the match or losing contact with the mentor. In 4 cases the mentor took a professional job that posed a conflict (became a DHHS caseworker or transition specialist). Occasionally, students did not continue to follow through (4 cases). The average match length for a UNL mentor was 325.4 days.

**Workforce Competencies**

Twenty-five youth, or 19.8%, attended employment training through Project Hire. Many youth were able to secure jobs, but maintaining that employment sometimes poses the bigger challenge.

Twenty-five youth found employment after being released from a YRTC (although 28 youth had employment at some point, only 25 kept employment for a measurable amount of time.) Nine of the youth who were employed also attended classes through Project Hire.

| <b>TABLE 9: YOUTH EMPLOYED BY ATTENDANCE IN PROJECT HIRE</b> |     |  |            |              |
|--|-----|--|------------|--------------|
|  |     | <i>Youth Attended HUB-Project Hire</i> |            | <i>Total</i> |
|  |     | <i>No</i>                              | <i>Yes</i> |              |
| Employed   | No  | 84                                     | 16         | 100          |
|  | Yes | 17                                     | 9          | 26           |
| <b>Total</b>   |     | <b>101</b>                             | <b>25</b>  | <b>126</b>   |

## Research Questions

Ultimately, the goal of the reentry services was to reduce recidivism. We first examined whether youth returned to a YRTC after being released.

Secondly, we examined whether youth spent time at the Lancaster County Youth Center (Juvenile Detention Center- JDC). Youth who have violated a court order, gone on run, or are not following system expectations are often sent to the JDC.

Finally, we turned our attention to whether reentry services impacted recidivism. Using the Nebraska Court Case Management System (JUSTICE) we examined three different measures of recidivism:

1. The number of felonies, misdemeanors, and infractions that the youth had **after** release from YRTC (based on the release date documented).<sup>2</sup>
2. The number of felonies, misdemeanors, and infractions that the youth had **after** being closed out of the Reentry Project (based on the closure date documented, rural youth will not have this count).
3. Number of youth who end up in the adult system (county jails, Department of Corrections, or state penitentiary).

### Methodology

Because the Juvenile Justice Institute was involved in Lancaster County's original OJJDP Second Chance Act Planning Grant, we had access to a control group that we were able to compare to the youth who received reentry services. The control sample consisted of 150 youth (75 females and 75 males) who were admitted to a YRTC between 2007 and 2012, and who were subsequently released to Lancaster County. The control group did not receive any formal reentry services because Lancaster County had not yet received the Second Chance Act grant, which overlapped with one year of the planning grant.

A number of factors can influence recidivism (defined as law violations after release from a YRTC). Logistic regression allowed us to examine a variety of variables, such as age, gender, YLS scores, and prior out-of-home placements. Then, we were able to include reentry services as a treatment. After analyzing the combined effect of reentry services, we then explored whether specific supports or programs statistically impacted recidivism.

Our primary outcome variable was whether youth were prosecuted for a felony or misdemeanor after having been released from a YRTC (based on the release date documented).

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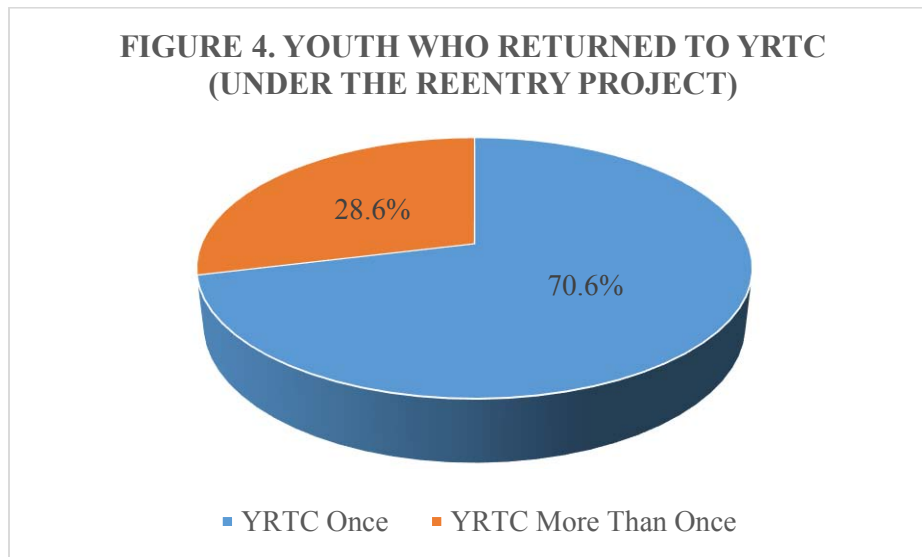
<sup>2</sup> Cases that were not included in the count: Truancy, Juvenile Uncontrollable, Abuse/Neglect, Civil cases. Cases that were pled down are counted as the pled down count and the original count was discarded. If cases did not have a sentence or closure but have a criminal/juvenile charge and a charge date, they were counted. If the case appeared to be a duplicate, it was discarded in order to avoid counting a case twice

## Outcome Measures

We captured a variety of outcomes for youth reentering Lancaster County. Below we describe the descriptive statistics of these outcome measures.

### Youth Who Return to YRTC

A total of 36 youth (28.6%) returned back to a YRTC while being served by the Reentry Project (“YRTC More Than Once in Figure 4). The revocation/recommitment reasons included truancy, refusing drug testing, running away, cutting and destroying an electronic monitor, failure to follow rules, and new law violations; there were no statistical differences between the various revocation/recommitment reasons.



### Lancaster County Youth Center – Juvenile Detention Center

Of the youth released from YRTC, roughly 50% (63 youth) were subsequently booked into the Lancaster County Youth Center – JDC after release. These 63 youth were booked an average of 2.0 times, with total times in detention (after release from YRTC) ranging from 1 to 8 times.

### Recidivism

When examining recidivism, we first considered which youth had been released from YRTC (some youth who were involved in the Reentry Project had been recommitted and some youth were never released during the project). A total of 114 youth were actually released from YRTC, however we were only able to collect recidivism data for 112 youth. Out of these 112 youth, 23.2% (26 youth) were committed and prosecuted for a serious new law violation after release (felony level offense). When considering misdemeanor offenses after release (non-traffic and not infractions), 62.5% had been prosecuted for a misdemeanor offense post release.

| <b>TABLE 10. FELONY LAW VIOLATION – SUBSEQUENT TO PROGRAM PARTICIPATION</b> |               |                |
|---|---------------|----------------|
|   | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
| Received new serious law violation  | 26            | 23.2           |
| No new serious law violation  | 86            | 76.8           |
| <b>Total*</b>   | <b>112</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |

\*A total of 114 youth were actually released from YRTC, however we were only able to collect recidivism data for 112 youth.

| <b>TABLE 11. MISDEMEANOR LAW VIOLATION – SUBSEQUENT TO PROGRAM PARTICIPATION</b> |               |                |
|--|---------------|----------------|
|  | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
| Received new minor law violation   | 70            | 62.5           |
| No new minor law violation   | 42            | 37.5           |
| <b>Total*</b>  | <b>112</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |

\*A total of 114 youth were actually released from YRTC, however we were only able to collect recidivism data for 112 youth.

### **County Jail**

Finally, some youth end up having contact with the adult system. Of the youth released from YRTC, roughly 17.5% (20 youth) were later booked into County Jail.

The reasons youth were sent to adult jail ranged from absconding from a YRTC Facility to failing to comply with conditions of liberty to committing new legal violations. The majority of youth who ended up in the adult system were 17-18 years old (72%). Only one youth who participated in the Reentry Project has been sentenced to prison, so we combined these outcome variables into a category called “Adult System.”

### **Runaway**

Running away became a significant obstacle to working with the youth returning to Lancaster County. When a youth goes on run, it is a violation of probation or the court order; it disrupts placement, education, and services. We found that 17.5% of youth (22 youth) ran away some time during the transition back to the community. Not surprisingly, runaway after release was significantly correlated with the total number of runs during the youth’s lifetime.

## Results

The goal of this research was to produce an estimate of the impact of the Reentry Project on youth reentering Lancaster County. Did involvement in the program reduce the likelihood that youth would return to YRTC or recidivate? Many of the components of the Reentry Project have intermediate objectives, such as education and prosocial peers, but the ultimate objective is successful reentry to the community.

We first examined the overall program effects by examining recidivism for youth in the pre-treatment group (n=150) compared to the youth who participated in the Reentry Project (n=126). We controlled for youth age, race, and recent YLS score, in addition to examining the impact of reentry participation on recidivism.

| <b>TABLE 12: COMPARISON OF MISDEMANOR REOFFENSES FOR YOUTH IN THE LANCASTER COUNTY REENTRY PROJECT AND YOUTH REENTERING WITHOUT SERVICES</b> |                       |                                    |                   |                                  |          |             |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <i>Model</i>   |                       | <i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i> |                   | <i>Standardized Coefficients</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|  |                       | <i>B</i>                           | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Beta</i>                      |          |             |
|  | (Constant)            | 1.249                              | 5.692             |                                  | .219     | .827        |
|  | Youth's Gender        | 1.021                              | .713              | .087                             | 1.432    | .154        |
|  | Black                 | 6.022                              | 5.546             | .463                             | 1.086    | .279        |
|  | Hispanic              | 4.805                              | 5.838             | .151                             | .823     | .411        |
|  | Native American       | 7.318                              | 5.708             | .284                             | 1.282    | .201        |
|  | Asian                 | 4.824                              | 5.873             | .134                             | .821     | .412        |
|  | Other                 | 7.013                              | 5.672             | .290                             | 1.236    | .217        |
|  | White                 | 5.322                              | 5.513             | .455                             | .965     | .335        |
|  | Program Participation | -4.505                             | .760              | -.383                            | -5.930   | .000        |
|  | Recent YLS            | -.053                              | .057              | -.055                            | -.925    | .356        |

a. Dependent Variable: Number of misdemeanors after youth's first release date for Pilot, and first release under grant for Reentry

### *Misdemeanor Level Recidivism*

We found that youth who participated in the Reentry Project had significantly fewer subsequent misdemeanor law violations ( $p=0$ ). On average, youth who were in the Reentry Project committed 4.5 fewer misdemeanor offenses after release than youth who were in the comparison group (before Lancaster County offered the reentry programming).

One issue that we thought might be confounding the number of offenses is the length of time that youth in the control group had been back in the community. As a result, we controlled for youth



who had been out of YRTC for 3.5-4 years and 4-5 years, to see if time was the true reason that youth not served by the Reentry Project had such high recidivism rates.

After controlling for time since release (Table 13), we found that time did not explain the dramatically high number of misdemeanor offenses. The main effect of program participation remains significant and appears to be stronger than the first analysis, even when controlling for gender, age, race, and recent YLS scores.

| <b>TABLE 13: COMPARISON OF MISDEMANOR REOFFENSES FOR YOUTH IN THE LANCASTER COUNTY REENTRY PROJECT AND YOUTH REENTERING WITHOUT SERVICES</b> |  |                                    |                   |                                  |          |             |
|--|--|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <i>Model</i>   |  | <i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i> |                   | <i>Standardized Coefficients</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|  |  | <i>B</i>                           | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Beta</i>                      |          |             |
|  | (Constant)                               | 1.733                              | 5.773             |                                  | .300     | .764        |
|  | Youth's Gender                           | 1.283                              | .728              | .110                             | 1.762    | .079        |
|  | Black                                    | 6.388                              | 5.540             | .491                             | 1.153    | .250        |
|  | Hispanic                                 | 5.152                              | 5.832             | .162                             | .883     | .378        |
|  | Native American                          | 7.438                              | 5.698             | .289                             | 1.305    | .193        |
|  | Asian                                    | 5.293                              | 5.888             | .147                             | .899     | .370        |
|  | Other                                    | 7.270                              | 5.671             | .301                             | 1.282    | .201        |
|  | White                                    | 5.620                              | 5.511             | .480                             | 1.020    | .309        |
|  | Program Participation                    | -5.616                             | 1.138             | -.477                            | -4.935   | .000        |
|  | Recent YLS                               | -.047                              | .057              | -.048                            | -.812    | .418        |
|  | Youth has been released 3 1/2 to 4 years | -2.626                             | 1.378             | -.144                            | -1.906   | .058        |
|  | Youth has been released 4 to 5 years     | -.900                              | 1.118             | -.071                            | -.805    | .422        |

a. Dependent Variable: Number of misdemeanors after youth's first release date for Pilot, and first release under grant for Reentry

#### *Felony Level Recidivism*

We then conducted the same analysis to see which youth were subsequently charged with a felony level offense. We found that the Reentry Project had little effect on being charged with a felony after release from YRTC. Only gender (specifically, being male) was a significant predictor of whether the youth would be filed on for a subsequent felony-level law violation.

#### *Booked into the Lancaster County Youth Center - Juvenile Detention Center*

When we examined whether a youth was booked into the JDC, the only variable that predicted whether the youth would spend time in detention was the total number of prior placements (which could include runaways). None of the youth's characteristics (gender, age, race) nor

program participation impacted whether a youth was subsequently booked into the Lancaster County Youth Center (Table 14).

| <b>TABLE 14: COMPARISON OF BOOK-IN TO DETENTION FOR YOUTH IN THE LANCASTER COUNTY REENTRY PROJECT AND YOUTH REENTERING WITHOUT SERVICES</b> |  |                                    |                   |                                  |          |             |
|---|--|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <i>Model</i>  |  | <i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i> |                   | <i>Standardized Coefficients</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|   |  | <i>B</i>                           | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Beta</i>                      |          |             |
|   | (Constant)   | .154                               | .162              |                                  | .950     | .343        |
|   | Youth's Gender                                     | .108                               | .063              | .107                             | 1.708    | .089        |
|   | Black  | .123                               | .112              | .112                             | 1.096    | .274        |
|   | Hispanic   | .152                               | .186              | .057                             | .818     | .414        |
|   | Native American                                    | -.186                              | .158              | -.087                            | -1.177   | .240        |
|   | White  | .024                               | .103              | .024                             | .235     | .814        |
|   | Is this youth part of Lancaster Reentry?           | .037                               | .100              | .037                             | .367     | .714        |
|   | Recent YLS   | -.001                              | .005              | -.009                            | -.150    | .881        |
|   | Youth has been released 3 1/2 to 4 years           | .216                               | .121              | .139                             | 1.779    | .076        |
|   | Youth has been released 4 to 5 years               | .085                               | .100              | .077                             | .853     | .394        |
|   | Total placements or disruptions in youth's history | .015                               | .004              | .243                             | 3.916    | .000        |

a. Dependent Variable: Youth booked into JDC

*Intervention-specific Impact on Recidivism*

Once we determined that the reentry services as a whole have a positive impact on youth, we then wanted to examine whether *specific* reentry interventions had differential impacts on recidivism. In other words, does having a public defender reduce the risk of being booked into detention? Does having a mentor reduce future law violations?

The reentry services developed in Lancaster County mapped nicely to Altschuler & Bilchik’s (2014) six critical functions:

| <b>TABLE 15: OPERATIONALIZED VARIABLES FOR SIX CRITICAL REENTRY FUNCTIONS</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Altschuler &amp; Bilchik’s Six Functions</i>                               | <i>Method for capturing function</i>                 |
| Assessment of Risk for Reoffending  | YLS Score  |
| Family Engagement   | Families Inspiring Families                          |
| Permanency Planning   | Mentoring  |
| Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions  | ART (too few youth completed this option to measure) |
| Release Readiness   | Education Specialist                                 |
| Staffing and Workforce Competencies   | Project Hire   |

We were interested in determining whether certain components or programs of the Reentry Project had a stronger effect than others. We examined these three youth outcomes:

1. Subsequently being charged for a misdemeanor offense;
2. Subsequently being charged for a felony offense; and
3. Subsequently being booked into the JDC

Again, we utilized regression analysis to test the effect of various youth characteristics (gender, age when referred<sup>3</sup>, race, most recent YLS) before we tested program effects.

The age that a youth was referred is the only significant variable that predicted whether he or she would be charged with a misdemeanor offense subsequent to release from a YRTC (this included juvenile and adult charges). The likelihood of a misdemeanor charge increased by one law violation for every additional month in a youth’s age. So, the older the youth, the more likely he or she was to recidivate.

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<sup>3</sup> We could not use age at referral in the previous analysis with the comparison group because the youth were never referred to an official program,

*Felony Offenses*

Gender and age at referral were significant predictors of whether a youth was charged with a felony-level violation post YRTC release. Specifically, being a slightly older male predicted a new felony charge.

| <b>TABLE 16. PREDICTORS OF FELONY RECIDIVISM AFTER PARTICIPATING IN REENTRY PROGRAMS – CONTROLLING FOR AGE, RACE AND GENDER</b> |                 |                                    |                   |                                  |          |             |
|---|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <i>Model</i>  |                 | <i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i> |                   | <i>Standardized Coefficients</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|   |                 | <i>B</i>                           | <i>Std. Error</i> | <i>Beta</i>                      |          |             |
|   | (Constant)      | -2.021                             | .615              |                                  | -3.283   | .001        |
|   | Gender          | .244                               | .080              | .277                             | 3.039    | .003        |
|   | Age             | .130                               | .036              | .336                             | 3.640    | .000        |
|   | White           | -.146                              | .207              | -.168                            | -.706    | .482        |
|   | Black           | .146                               | .207              | .169                             | .707     | .481        |
|   | Hispanic        | .130                               | .207              | .092                             | .629     | .531        |
|   | Native American | -.060                              | .257              | -.032                            | -.235    | .815        |
|   | Asian           | -.433                              | .342              | -.136                            | -1.266   | .208        |

a Dependent Variable: Number of felonies after youth's first release

We then examined which factors predicted whether a youth would subsequently be charged with a felony law violation and we controlled for participation in different reentry programs in the model.<sup>4</sup> There were no significant patterns of recidivism by program participation. In other words, having a public defender was not more effective at reducing recidivism or having an education specialist or a mentor. Being male and slightly older increased the likelihood of having a felony offense while reentering the community.

*Misdemeanor Offenses*

When we repeated this analysis, examining charges filed for misdemeanor violations, the only characteristic that influenced the outcome was the age of the youth when referred to the Reentry Project.

*Returned to YRTC*

When we examined what factors influenced whether a youth was sent back to YRTC, age and gender were no longer significant. The more prior placements the youth had (over their lifetime) the more likely he or she was to be recommitted to YRTC.

*Booked into the Lancaster County Youth Center - Juvenile Detention Center*

The number of prior placements significantly predicts whether a youth will return to YRTC, but it also significantly predicts whether the youth will spend time at the JDC as they reenter the community. When we examined whether participation in a particular program influenced this outcome, we saw that having the public defender assigned to the case significantly reduced the

<sup>4</sup> The ART Program had too few participants to be included.

youth's likelihood of being booked into the JDC, even after we controlled for participation in other programs.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the Reentry Project was very effective for youth when *all* of the various program elements were taken into account. This supports Antchuler and Bilchek's (2014) theory that reentry programs are *most effective* when they contain six functions, or components, operating in concert with one another.

Age was the most consistently significant characteristic that influenced whether additional charges would be filed. That is, the older the youth, the more likely he or she was to have subsequent charges filed. Awareness of this should allow programs in Lancaster County to devote extra attention to older youth returning to the community, and to examine particular factors that may be influencing this outcome. For instance, older youth may have more difficulty being welcomed back by a parent or guardian or suitable housing, schooling, or employment may not be available.

### **Limitations and Future Analysis**

Overall there are relatively few cases (n=126) in the treatment group, which hinders a complete analysis of treatment effect. Especially in cases where only three youth completed the program, it is virtually impossible that program effect would be detected.

Even with the small number of cases in the overall treatment group, some important effects were found. Because of these significant and important findings, researchers at the Juvenile Justice Institute plan to continue to examine this dataset. In addition to youth characteristics, program participation may mask an underlying mediator effect. For example, being assigned a Public Defender appears to significantly impact whether a youth spends time in the Lancaster County Youth Center – JDC.

Future research should focus on whether there is a particular "active ingredient" through which the Reentry Project operates. In addition, there may be program level effects for one or more sub populations. For example, perhaps mentoring was very effective for females, but when males are added to the analysis, the effect is masked and the overall impact of the individual program is not significant. Additional research will help focus efforts on specific populations, and therefore have the biggest effect on a youth's future.

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## APPENDIX

# YOUTH RE-ENTERING LANCASTER COUNTY AFTER COMMITMENT TO A STATE YOUTH REHABILITATION CENTER



Juvenile Justice Institute  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
310 N 17<sup>th</sup> Street – 310 Nebraska Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68588  
(402) 472-4234  
September 2012

Principal Investigator: Anne M. Hobbs, PhD., JD  
Secondary Investigator: Johanna Peterson  
Juvenile Justice Institute, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
College of Public Affairs and Community Service

## **INTRODUCTION**

The number of individuals in prisons and jails is at an all-time high, and the vast majority will be released back into their communities at some point. An estimated five million individuals were on probation or parole at the end of 2010, and each of these individuals will face a number of issues and obstacles upon their return. Often they lack services and the support necessary to succeed. In April 2008, Congress signed into law The Second Chance Act (SCA), in order to address the lack of support and services for individuals re-entering our communities.

Lancaster County, Nebraska received a planning grant to address the number of juveniles re-entering the community. From October 2011 to September 2012, Lancaster County developed a Reentry Team and set out to establish a baseline of the needs for youth re-entering the community after placement at one of the state's Rehabilitation Treatment Centers (Kearney or Geneva), to determine gaps in services. They also hoped to establish baseline recidivism rates.

## **DATA QUALITY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To assist the Reentry Team with this process, the Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) reviewed 150 electronic records of youth from Lancaster County who were discharged from either YRTC Geneva (75 youth) or YRTC Kearney (75 youth). JJI also examined hardcopy files from 25 of the youth placed at Geneva. To establish a baseline, researchers examined four key research questions:

1. What are youth's needs as they re-enter Lancaster County? (as indicated by the Youth Level Services/ Case Management Inventory and review of files);
2. How well do we prepare youth and families for the youth's return (as indicated by family team meetings); and
3. How often do youth recidivate, indicated by the number of times a youth returned to the YRTC facility.
4. How effectively do we work as a community to ensure that re-entry services are available for youth returning to our community (using a collective impact philosophy)?

## **MEASUREMENT TOOLS**

In Nebraska, system-involved youth are often assessed using the Youth Level Services/ Case Management Inventory. The YLS is derived from the Level of Service Inventory Revised (LSI-R), a standardized risk assessment for adult offenders created by Andrews and Bonta (Thompson & Pope, 2005; Bechtel, Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2007). There are a handful of studies that demonstrate the predictive validity of the YLS/CMI. Bechtel, Lowenkamp and Latessa (2007) examined the relationship between recidivism and YLS/CMI scores by assessing 4,482 cases where juveniles were serving both community-based and institutional sentences. They chose these divergent settings to determine whether the tool was truly effective in identifying different risk levels. Their findings indicate that the YLS/CMI is effective at predicting juvenile recidivism for youth in both community settings and institutional settings. For most of the 150 youth, JJI was able to examine YLS/CMI scores at two points of time:

- The first YLS on record was selected because it reflects the youth's needs as he or she entered the system.
- The YLS score at exit, generally sixty days after release from the YRTC.

### **Family Team Meetings**

The analysis of Family Team Meetings included a smaller random selection of twenty-five files. JJI examined the notes that case workers enter into the Family Team Meetings section of NFOCUS. Researchers then utilized qualitative software that facilitated content analysis. Family team meeting documentation ranged from 2 to 31 pages per file. Within the files, JJI coded 691 individual codes in 44 code categories. We were specifically looking for the regularity of the meetings held, the persons present and the subjects discussed, so that we could analyze if the family team meetings helped prepare the youth for reentry.

### **Recidivism**

Data for our examination of recidivism was provided by the YRTC facilities and included a count of youth who had been recommitted to YRTC after the initial release.

### **Collective Impact**

Collective impact refers to the "commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem (Kania and Kramer 2011). To assess Lancaster County's capacity to develop a common agenda for youth re-entering our community, we tracked attendance patterns and five elements present in groups that operate using collective impact. The key components of effective collective impact include: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations (Kania and Kramer 2011).

## ASSESSING NEED BASED ON YLS SCORES

On average, Lancaster County youth re-entering the community had the YLS assessment conducted 4 separate times during their juvenile justice system involvement. Of the 150 youth we examined, their first YLS assessment was done at an average age of 15.5 (ages ranged from 12 to 19). The average aggregate YLS score was 20.1 with a range from 2 to 35. (Higher scores indicate higher levels of need and risk.)

Youth showed the greatest need in four domains:

- Education and Employment Needs ( $m=3.7$ )
- Personality and Behavior ( $m=3.6$ )
- Family Circumstances and Parenting ( $m=3.4$ )
- Peer Relations ( $m=3.1$ )

Although there were some differences in mean scores across gender, there were only two domains where males and females demonstrated significantly different YLS scores.

- Young women released from Geneva demonstrated a higher level of need in leisure and recreation ( $p<.05$ ) at the time they were assessed.
- Young men released from Kearney demonstrated a higher level of need in the area of education and employment ( $p<.05$ ) at the time they were assessed.

**Table 1: Average YLS Scores By Gender and Domain**

|         | Family Circumstance | Education & Emp. | Peer Relations | Substance Abuse | Leisure & Rec | Personality & Behavior | Attitude & Orientation |
|---------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Males   | 3.2                 | 3.9              | 3.0            | 1.9             | 1.8           | 3.8                    | 2.2                    |
| Females | 3.6                 | 3.4              | 3.2            | 1.7             | 2.1           | 3.4                    | 2.1                    |



## **ASSESSING NEED BASED ON CPS HISTORY**

We also examined the families' contacts with Nebraska Health and Human Services' Child Protective Services (CPS), and court involvement, to assess a families' potential need for services. The families and youth involved in this sample had multiple contacts with the system, and most could be defined as "Cross-over Youth<sup>1</sup>." Of the 150 youth in this sample, 131 youth (87.3%) had a history of CPS contact as a victim of abuse and/or neglect. On average, youth had 5.34 CPS calls prior to entry into YRTC (calls related to that specific child). When we examined CPS contact by family (and did not limit it to the specific child placed at the YRTC), families (of youth in this sample) had a mean of 7.85 contacts with CPS.

Children that are a part of the child welfare system have a higher likelihood of becoming a juvenile delinquent (Herz, Lee, Lutz, Stewart, Tuell, Wiig, Bilchik, and Kelly, 2102). This is especially the case when the child welfare involvement continues into young adulthood. The average age of the first contact with CPS for youth re-entering after YRTC was 13.2 years old and ranged from 5 to 18.7 years of age.

Recent studies show that persistent maltreatment extending from infancy to adulthood and maltreatment during adolescence are significantly correlated with increased risk of juvenile delinquency and criminality (Thornberry, 2008). Many maltreated youth cross over from the child welfare system into the juvenile justice and other systems of care. Child abuse and neglect increase the risk of any arrest of a juvenile by 55 percent and the risk of committing a violent crime by 96 percent (Widom, 1989).

## **ASSESSING STABILITY BASED ON PLACEMENTS**

Vulnerable young people face even greater obstacles to success when they are involved in more than one system of care (Altschuler, Stangler, Berkley and Burton, 2009). The majority of youth in this sample experienced numerous placements in their lifetimes, making them even more vulnerable. The total number of placements a youth had experienced ranged from 1 to 41 (per individual child), with an average of 11.3 per child.

Again, there were significant differences between males and females, with young women having the higher average number of out of home placements: females had an average of 12.2 placements while men had an average of 10.3 placements. Additional research should be done to determine whether there are gender differences in pre-YRTC placement.

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<sup>1</sup> Research has demonstrated that juveniles who experience abuse and neglect often cross over into delinquent behavior. The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) has developed a practice model that recommends particular principles to reduce the number of youth who crossover between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

## ASSESSING CURRENT REENTRY POLICY

The current Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Reentry Policy has many evidence based practice (EBP) elements designed to facilitate successful reentry. For instance, family team meetings should occur monthly with the youth's support group to discuss the youth's transition back to the community. The document has a clear definition of a family team meeting:

- The people present should always include the youth, family, informal and formal supports, and JSO/FPS.
- Discussions should include placement for the youth after the facility.
- Any changes in these plans should be discussed with the youth and other members of the team. The JSO/FPS should discuss progress and needs of the youth and should help the youth follow their individual treatment plan to help with their transitioning. This individualized treatment plan should be discussed at the meetings as well.
- If pre-placement furlough is available, the youth is expected to re-enroll in school, apply for employment, set up treatment, and get acquainted with the reentry placement setting. A checklist is given to the youth when they are on furlough that they must complete. According to the policy it is unclear as to what this checklist includes.

Deficits within the DHHS Policy include a lack of assigning responsibility and specific guidance. For instance, if a youth is given a list of expectations (services to be set up either on furlough or at reentry) there is no indication of who is responsible for arranging the services or if the youth receives any assistance. Similarly, there is no listing of services or resources available in the community.

## ASSESSING FREQUENCY OF FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS

To see whether family team meetings met each of the elements, we examined the content of 25 files. First, we examined how often family team meetings occurred.

- Only two of the 25 files reviewed had documentation of transition planning discussions during the monthly meetings (8% of files reviewed).
- Few meetings met the definition of a family team meeting (as defined by DHHS Policy). Only 7 of the 75 (9.3%) of the youth discharged from Kearney had meetings that met the definition, and only 5 of the 75 youth (6.6%) of the youth from Geneva. One reason for this may be because the policy appears fairly new. It also may be a definitional issue.

Table 2 (on the next page) indicates the team meetings that the YRTC classified as a family team meeting.

| Facility | Total # of FTM's | # Total Youth |
|----------|------------------|---------------|
| Kearney  | 8                | 7             |
| Geneva   | 8                | 5             |

The differences in definition became clear when the Institute counted narratives labeled "Family Team Meetings" in NFOCUS. Table 3 illustrates the number of meetings caseworkers labeled as family team meetings. Part of the reason for the disparity is that meetings that occurred before DHHS policy was enacted do not qualify under the current DHHS definition. Another aspect involves timing – many family team meetings documented in table 3 occurred after the youth was released.

| Facility | FTM's BEFORE YRTC | FTM's AFTER YRTC | Total FTM's | # Total Youth |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Kearney  | 217               | 282              | 499         | 70            |
| Geneva   | 337               | 291              | 628         | 67            |
| Total    | 554               | 573              | 1127        | 137           |

### **ASSESSING CONTENT OF FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS**

Unfortunately, some of the narratives labeled as a family team meeting lacked content that we would anticipate in a reentry planning meeting. One clear example of this is when a youth is neither present nor discussed during the meeting. Although it is appropriate to discuss a sibling or parent's progress during the family team meeting, this should be in the context of the youth's release. In 32% of the files reviewed, (8 of the 25), the team meeting was a combined family team meeting with siblings involved in some of meetings.

We also coded transition discussions following the DHHS Policy as a guideline for desired topics (placement, education, needs, furlough, etc.), and found the following:

- **Timing:** In some cases the planning process did not begin until shortly before the youth's release from the YRTC.
- **Participation:** In 53 different meetings (21 of the 25 files), it was clear that critical participants (like the youth or a parent) were not present.

- Placement: Often the team discussed problems the youth was having within the facility or at the placement after YRTC.
- Education: This area was addressed with regularity, and fell into two categories:
  - i. the youth's education while in facility,
  - ii. transition planning for returning to the community,
- Employment Needs. Individual youth almost never had a specific plan for employment. Documented meetings generally occurred *after the youth had already returned to the community.*

Despite limitations, some files had good examples of reentry planning and discussion: 18 of the 25 files, or 72%, contained at least some team discussion of the youth's reentry and specific transition planning prior to release. In 28% of the files, there was little evidence of transition planning for the youth.

#### **LIMITATION OF CODING NFOCUS DOCUMENTATION**

Clearly our analysis of the data and the narratives is only as good as the case worker's data entry into the state's system (NFOCUS). It was very clear that some caseworkers document better than others. But it may also be that those caseworkers hold family team meetings that adhere to DHHS policy AND document better. We saw certain patterns of repetition, like the same statement repeated multiple times: "Johnny will need to enroll in school when he returns to Lincoln." It might be that the case worker had more in depth discussion about Johnny's education and simply did not document it well.

#### **RECIDIVISM**

One final element of the baseline that Lancaster County sought to establish was a recidivism baseline. The Reentry Team defined recidivism as "a return to secure confinement with either a new adjudication/conviction or as the result of a violation of the terms of supervision within 12 months of initial release."<sup>2</sup>

"Secure Confinement" was defined as a "return to one of the Youth Rehabilitation Treatment Centers (Kearney or Geneva), or an adult facility, for a new conviction. "Violation of terms of supervision" includes revocation or violation due to a new law violation, or as the result of a technical violation (miss curfew, truant from school, and fail to report, on run).

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<sup>2</sup> Recidivism has since been re-defined as a "Conviction or adjudication of a misdemeanor II or above in adult court, subdivision 1 or above in juvenile court within one year of successful release from supervision. (Release from supervision is the date that they receive their successful release letter).

The group discussed the use of detention to stabilize youth and prevent them from being officially recommitted or committing a new law violation. For planning purposes (and to assess utilization of resources), data was gathered on youth in this sample who were booked into juvenile detention.

### **DATA QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY**

Data on youth released and readmitted to YRTC Geneva and YRTC Kearney were reported by each of the facilities. Lancaster County Juvenile Detention Center staff provided a list of all youth admitted to their facility between 2007 and 2012.

### **READMISSIONS TO A YOUTH REHABILITATION FACILITY**

Of the 150 youth released from a Youth Rehabilitation Center, 61 youth or 40.7% were subsequently readmitted to the same facility. Of the youth who are recommitted, many (41%) are recommitted within the first year after being released (25 of the 61 total). When examined by gender and facility, we found that only 10.7% of the young women (8 of the 75 released) were recommitted to the facility. When a young woman is recommitted within the first year of release, on average it occurs at six month post release (151 days). Of the 75 most recently released young women, all of the commitments (8) were for a new law violation.

Young men demonstrated a different pattern: 29.3% of the young men released from Kearney end up recommitted to the facility (22 of the 75 released). Roughly 91% of young men who are recommitted are sent back within the first year (compared to 63% of young women). Of the young men who are recommitted, the average number of days from release to recommitment is 229 days. Technical violations were the most common reason that young men were recommitted to YRTC Kearney, explaining 77.3% of commitments (Table 4 and Table 5).

**Table 4: Youth Recommitted By Facility**

| Facility | Total # of Youth Readmitted | # Total Youth Released | Total # of Youth Readmitted w/i first year | New Law Violation | Technical  |
|----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--|-------------------|------------|
| Kearney  | 22 (29.3%)                  | 75                     | 20   | 5 (22.7%)         | 17 (77.3%) |
| Geneva   | 8 (10.7%)                   | 75                     | 5  | 8 (100%)          | 0          |

| <b>Table 5: Technical Violations Cited as reason to Recommit to Kearney</b> |
|---|
| Possession of Drugs   |
| Auto Theft  |
| Assault/Parole Violator   |
| Disturbing the Peace  |
| Auto Theft/Parole Violator  |
| Possession of Drugs/Parole Violator   |
| Possession of Drug Paraphernalia/Parole Violator                            |
| Criminal Mischief   |
| Assault/Sherman County  |
| Possession of Drugs/Parole Violator   |
| Vandalism/Parole Violator   |
| Criminal Mischief/Parole Violator   |
| Assault   |
| Burglary/Parole Violator  |
| Possession of Drugs/Parole Violator   |
| Criminal Mischief   |

### **YOUTH BOOKED INTO JUVENILE DETENTION**

From July 2007 to May 2012, youth in this sample (150 youth) were booked into the Lancaster County Juvenile Detention 120 times. Eighty-eight occurred within the first year of release, 24 in the second year, and 8 in the third year post release. The average length of stay for the youth first placement (post YRTC) was 4.23 days. Subsequent average lengths decline sharply, at .93 and then .55 average length of stay for the 150 youth in this sample. The Reentry Team discussed the use of local detention facilities as a means of stabilizing youth –over a period of days – to prevent serious behaviors that could potentially return the youth to the state facility. Future reentry discussion should address the use of detention, explore non-secure detention and determine whether there are other means of stabilizing youth in the community. The economic ramifications and reallocation of funds should also be discussed at that time.

### **COLLECTIVE IMPACT AND SHARED AGENDA**

For a community to make significant reform to its juvenile justice system, a group of committed and influential leaders must come together and share a common vision or agenda. Too often juvenile justice providers operate in a world of “isolated impact” (Kania and Kramer 2011). That is, we work in silos and impact only the small group of people directly around us. This environment is a reality in a world of decreasing budgets, but is not the most efficient way to serve youth or create

change. Collective impact refers to the “commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem (Kania and Kramer 2011). To assess Lancaster County’s capacity to develop a common agenda for youth reentering our community, we measured the key components of effective collective impact. These include: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations. Lancaster County served as the backbone support agency, completing all necessary grant reports and payments and provided a consistent, neutral, and comfortable meeting site. Similarly, a private consultant arranged consistent meetings and established continuous communication with the Reentry Team. These elements of collective impact were straight-forward and easy to measure and provided an excellent base for the group to work from.

The remaining three elements (a common agenda, shared measurement systems, and mutually reinforcing activities) were more difficult to measure. Professionals may tacitly agree in meeting, but not really see eye-to-eye or share a common vision with the group. Consequently, we analyzed whether the group had a common agenda by examining attendance at meetings. As a general rule, individuals will limit interactions or not participate fully if they do not agree with or internalize the goals (Smith, D., Heckmeyer, C. Kratt, P., and Mason D., 1997).

A total of 8 Reentry specific meetings took place from November 2011 to August 2012. The first meeting, held in October 2011, was not included in our evaluation because it was an introductory meeting on the reentry project. Meetings were not held in January 2012 (due to conflicting schedule with legislature) and May 2012 (due to the planning conference in Washington D.C.).

| Table 6: Meeting Attendance of Key Stakeholders |                   |       |
|---|-------------------|-------|
| Agency  | Meetings Attended | %     |
| HUB   | 8                 | 100%  |
| YRTC-K  | 8                 | 100%  |
| JJI   | 8                 | 100%  |
| YRTC-G  | 7                 | 87.5% |
| OJS   | 7                 | 87.5% |
| DHHS  | 7                 | 87.5% |
| Lancaster County                                | 7                 | 87.5% |
| Detention                                       | 7                 | 87.5% |
| Probation                                       | 6                 | 75%   |
| Department of Education                         | 6                 | 75%   |
| Project Everlast                                | 4                 | 50%   |
| LPS   | 4                 | 50%   |
| KVC   | 2                 | 25%   |
| Families Inspiring Families                     | 1                 | 12.5% |

Overall, key professional agencies were involved and the project moved forward after the legislative session ended. Table 6 demonstrates attendance patterns from key agencies over planning grants' time frame.

Attendance patterns demonstrate an overall commitment to a shared agenda. Agencies representing the youth "voice" had more difficulty attending meetings, likely due to the times meetings are scheduled (rather than a lack of consensus with the group). Future efforts work may want to examine other methods (emails, surveys) for including the youth perspective.

Political stress also influenced attendance. For example, in 2012, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) underwent dramatic changes in the privatization of child welfare and case management. Consequently, a handful of professionals that showed deep commitment early on, stopped attending meetings due to changes in the system. One of the key DHHS contacts changed jobs a few months into the process. She was critical in explaining the data collection process through NDEN and NFOCUS. She was very knowledgeable on field operations. Although other DHHS workers filled her place in upcoming meetings, there was a lack of consistency. Similarly, a key DHHS decision maker was unable to attend some meetings because her presence was needed in the legislature. One meeting was rescheduled, but others moved forward and were not as productive without a key decision maker.

Although the Reentry Team did not always reach consensus or agree to a shared measurement system, they agreed to keep working. In one of the final meetings of the Lancaster Reentry Pilot, the Reentry Team agreed to develop smaller workgroups to work through some of these issues and bring the consensus back to the larger group.

#### **CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The cohesion and dedication of the Reentry Team demonstrated an overall common agenda: for Lancaster County to better meet the needs of youth returning to their community, in order to prevent youth from deeper involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system.

Four key recommendations will assist the Reentry Team in maintaining the momentum they have gathered over the past year:



1. Youth included in this sample had a high number of placements in their relatively short lifetimes. Every attempt to provide consistent community-based services that focus on the high need areas (Education and Employment Needs, Personality and Behavior, Family Circumstances and Parenting and Peer Relations) will help to stabilize the lives of the youth involved in the system.
2. Future work should find ways to incorporate the perspective of system-involved youth. If attendance at professional meetings is not feasible, -- email surveys, web conferencing, paper surveys or some other means should be incorporated.
3. Future team discussion should address the use of detention, and whether there are other means of stabilizing youth in the community, as well as the economic ramifications of this change.
4. Smaller workgroups across multiple agencies and stakeholders should be convened to continue work in each of the areas identified by the team. For example, data must be collected on critical variables like graduation rates, or GED attainment, employment, programming options, and recidivisms rates. This data will help inform future efforts toward a shared data system and will help identify where gaps in services exists.

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