

Mental Health / Juvenile Justice

ActionNetwork A Project of
ModelsforChange

Family Engagement and Involvement

**Strategic Innovations from the
Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network**

Prepared by the National Center for Mental Health/Juvenile Justice

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ModelsforChange
Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice

Prepared by:

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Models for Change

Models for Change is an effort to create successful and replicable models of juvenile justice reform through targeted investments in key states, with core support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Models for Change seeks to accelerate progress toward a more effective, fair, and developmentally sound juvenile justice system that holds young people accountable for their actions, provides for their rehabilitation, protects them from harm, increases their life chances, and manages the risk they pose to themselves and to the public. The initiative is underway in Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington, and through action networks focusing on key issues, in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Background

The Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network unanimously selected the topic of family involvement as the final SIG project to be taken on by the Network of eight states. While there was broad support for this issue within the Network, there was less agreement on the specific project to be undertaken by each state. To better define the nature and parameters of the project, the NCMHJJ convened several family SIG meetings in 2009 to review possible options for the SIG project and reach preliminary consensus around the focus of the work to be taken on by the Network. We invited representatives in to talk with us about national trends in this area and possible directions for the Network. At the end of the meetings, we were able to successfully narrow the scope down to several important areas: training juvenile justice staff; empowering families; and adapting an existing parent advocacy curriculum. Following is a summary of the involved state's activities to date.

Training Juvenile Justice Staff

Pennsylvania, Texas and Ohio have all worked to promote the issue of family involvement within juvenile justice systems:

Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's Family Involvement SIG team was given formal status as the Family Involvement (FI) Committee of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, which establishes a long-term institutional home for their Family Involvement work going forward.. The FI committee developed the "Family Guide to Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System", a resource for parents whose children are involved with the juvenile justice system that will ultimately be posted as a template on-line and available for jurisdictions to adapt accordingly. In addition, the FI committee developed the "Family Involvement in Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System" curriculum, a curriculum for juvenile probation officers that was piloted in 2011 in three sites reaching over 90 probation staff. In addition, Finally, the committee sponsored three regional forums for multi system teams from three counties to do self-assessments and develop work plans around family involvement.

Ohio. Ohio focused on the creation of a parent speaker's bureau to address juvenile justice stakeholders across the state on the importance and benefits of family engagement. To do this, they contracted with Tennessee Voices for Children to develop 1) a curriculum to help train family members on how to do presentations and trainings for professionals; and 2) a curriculum, "Effective Family Engagement" to be used by the parent trainers to educate and inform juvenile justice professionals on why and how to engage family members. The Ohio Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health is coordinating this effort and working with the Summit County Juvenile Court to pilot these trainings and disseminate the curricula.

Texas. Texas focused its efforts on the creation of a juvenile justice environment that is receptive to family involvement. To this end, the Texas Family Engagement/Involvement SIG developed a family engagement training curriculum to educate and inform juvenile justice practitioners on family engagement and ways to support families. The team developed a web-based compendium of resources for youth and families in Tarrant County called Tarrant Cares, and launched this in March 2011. Finally, the team piloted the use of a family engagement support coordinator within the Tarrant County Juvenile Probation Department (the first position of its kind in that probation department) to provide on-going support and assistance to juvenile probation officers with respect to family engagement, and provide on-going consultation to the department on family engagement activities.

Empowering Families

Two states within the Network, Washington and Illinois, focused their efforts on empowering and educating family members and youth to become more knowledgeable about the juvenile justice system and about mental health services available to youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

Illinois. The Illinois Action Network Family Engagement workgroup determined that their family engagement work would focus on the creation of resources to help youth and families understand their rights and be effective advocates for youth with mental health needs in the juvenile justice system. They hired a community organizer and a communications specialist and convened focus groups with youth throughout the state, and held meetings with key stakeholders to help guide and shape the content, tone and format for these materials and resources. They used this process to develop two, easy to use information guides: *“Your Guide to the Juvenile Justice System in Illinois”*, a know-your-rights graphic novel for youth which provides details about navigating the juvenile justice system; and *“The Juvenile Justice System: A Guide for Families in Illinois”*, which informs parents about legal rights, the court process, how to prevent arrest, and how to find mental health and support services.

Washington. Washington, recognizing the need for peer support within the juvenile court system, developed Juvenile Justice 101, a peer support program that serves families on site at the juvenile court building. It was developed with input from parents and youth to address the most critical needs of families during the court process. JJ 101 is a weekly orientation training held in the lobby of the King County Juvenile Court for families that introduces common terms, people, and hearings involved with the juvenile court process. An accompanying JJ 101

Resource Guide is distributed to participants, paid JJ 101 Family Partners make presentations and answer questions, and community providers talk about available services. A video and training guide were also developed for the course which was piloted in King County Juvenile Court in November 2010. Recent efforts have been undertaken to adapt the model for implementation in Benton Franklin Juvenile Court.

Adapting, Implementing and Evaluating the PEP Model for Juvenile Justice

Colorado, Connecticut, Louisiana. These three states are working with the NCMHJJ and the Reach Institute to adapt the existing Parent Empowerment Program (PEP) for families involved with the juvenile justice system. The original PEP training targeted families whose children were involved with the mental health system and was designed to empower and educate families to become strong advocates for their children. A similar goal is driving the juvenile justice adaptation- to create a training program that will help families better understand the juvenile justice system and the services available to youth who become involved with the system, and will simultaneously train juvenile justice staff to better understand the perspective and needs of family members whose children are involved with the juvenile system. A workgroup was formed with representatives from each of the three states to adapt and modify the PEP training for juvenile justice. A final draft of the curriculum was developed in November 2010 and the NCMHJJ and Reach Institute jointly convened a two-day train the trainer for training teams from each state to review the content and practice delivery. From January through early March

2011, the draft PEP-JJ was piloted in the three states. Participant and trainer feedback was collected from the pilot sites and used to revise the curriculum.

Family Resource Inventory

In addition to the work being done in the states, the NCMHJJ developed a comprehensive Family Resources Inventory to assist the Action Network states in the identification of publications and resources that address the barriers families and caretakers may face when a youth with mental health issues is involved in the juvenile justice system. The Inventory includes documents with advocacy tips and information on how best to navigate the intricacies of the justice system. In addition, there are resources geared toward juvenile justice staff and policymakers that can assist in the reformation of policies and procedures to address barriers between families and the justice system and improve how systems interact with family and youth.

For information about any of the family involvement resources or tools developed by Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network, please contact the NCMHJJ:

National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice

Policy Research Associates

345 Delaware Avenue

Delmar, NY 12054

518-439-7415 ext.5221

ncmhjj@prainc.com

www.ncmhjj.com