

EVALUATION OF LANCASTER COUNTY ALTERNATIVES TO JUVENILE DETENTION



Juvenile Justice Institute
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Nebraska Hall 521.2
Omaha, NE 68182
(402) 472-4234

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Principal Investigator: Anne M. Hobbs
Secondary Investigators: Julie L. Rogers and T. Hank Robinson, Ph.D.
Graduate Assistant: Myungwoo Kim
Juvenile Justice Institute, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
College of Public Affairs and Community Service

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Executive Summary

In June 2009, the Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) was contracted to evaluate four of Lancaster County's Juvenile Justice Programs: Cedars Day Reporting Center, Cedars Evening Reporting Center, Project HIRE, and Cedars Juvenile Diversion. Each of these was identified as a detention alternative. The Institute was further charged with addressing three research questions:

- ✓ Are detention alternatives keeping youth out of detention and; thereby, saving taxpayers money?
- ✓ Are Lancaster County's detention alternative programs using "evidence based models" and, if so, have they been implemented with fidelity?
- ✓ Are there other evidence-based programs that research has shown to be effective with this population?

In addition, Lancaster County hoped to examine whether youth who complete these programs committed new legal offenses and ended up more deeply entrenched in the juvenile justice system. At the time of this report, the Lancaster County juvenile justice coordinator did not have access to the Nebraska Criminal Justice Information System (NCJIS) to examine recidivism. Access alone does not answer the question of recidivism with accuracy. If Lancaster County plans to utilize recidivism as a long term measure, they must uniformly define the terminology and grant the coordinator access. Although some definitions of recidivism are proposed in this report from across the nation, determining how stable a youth is offers information potentially more useful than simple recidivism. Results from Lancaster County's use of the Youth Stability Reporting Instrument are included; these offer us new ways to examine a juvenile's potential for re-offending.

One of the key findings and primary obstacles to this evaluation was the lack of coordinated data systems. This obstacle echoes a finding of the 2007 evaluation of the Juvenile

Justice System in Lancaster County. In that report, the Institute noted that gaps exist in the coordination and documentation of juvenile justice interventions utilized in serving young offenders. Although Lancaster County made significant progress in many of the priorities identified in the prior report, the lack of coordinated and consistent data collection continues to be a problem. The gap in documentation made it impossible to provide an in-depth assessment of cost savings realized through the use of detention alternatives.

Despite concerns regarding the lack of data, our findings demonstrate that Lancaster County Detention Alternative Programs are using many of the evidence-based practices defined by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). These programs appear to be effective in preventing youth from going deeper into the juvenile justice system.

Introduction: The Genesis of Detention Alternatives

The main focus of this evaluation was to determine best-practices strategies and the efficacy of alternatives to detention in Lancaster County. Detention alternatives arose out of an era that was “tough on crime.” In response to the increasing juvenile crime during the 1980s, the criminal justice system established retributive measures such as mandatory juvenile sentences, and mandatory transfer of serious juvenile offenders to adult criminal court. The goals of these measures were to increase public safety and to hold young offenders accountable, but an unintended consequence also emerged. Juvenile detention became a booming business; centers were at capacity and overflowing. Despite tougher measures and an increased reliance on detention, the juvenile crime wave did not abate in the 1990s. After two decades of retributive measures, juvenile crime rates remained relatively stable and detention rates soared. “Between 1985 and 1995, for example, the number of kids locked up in detention centers on an average day rose by 74 percent” (Stanfield pg. 6). By the mid 1990’s OJJDP recognized the need for reform and encouraged the establishment of alternatives to detention (Coupet, 2000; Austin, Johnson & Weitzer, 2005). Lancaster County was no exception to this trend of rising detention rates and by the 1990s also began creating detention alternatives for juveniles. This report will focus on the Lancaster County Detention Alternative Programs most commonly employed to address juvenile delinquency including: Cedars Day and Evening Reporting Centers, Cedars Juvenile Diversion Services and The HUB’s Project HIRE (Helping Improve Readiness for Employment).

Juvenile detention alternatives are programs or services offered to juvenile offenders prior to or upon adjudication. The overarching goal of these services is to avoid placement in a

juvenile detention facility and to serve youth in the appropriate level of service. Contrary to the philosophy of the “tough on crime” era, experts now recognize that that placement in a juvenile facility is generally detrimental to youth development and does not deter future illegal behaviors. “Research shows that youth who spend time in custody are less likely to complete high school, less likely to avoid re-arrest, less likely to find employment, and less likely to form stable families. They are also more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol” (Mendel, 2009, p. 4). In short, detention accomplishes none of the goals that we set to prevent juvenile delinquency or for young people in our communities.

Nationwide, there are various types of detention alternatives. Many communities utilize drug treatment programs, job and life-skills training, and counseling as alternatives to detention. It is important to look at goals and objectives used nationwide because communities that use detention alternatives effectively have very similar short-term and long-term goals –despite the fact that they are very different communities.

Almost universally, the short-term goals of alternatives to detention are: 1) to reduce the days a young person spends in juvenile detention (aecf.org), 2) to improve court appearance rates and 3) to reduce the occurrence of new crimes committed by offenders during the pre-adjudication period. The long-term goals of the detention alternative programs are to reduce recidivism and prison overcrowding (McBride & VanderWaal, 1997; Bahn & Davis, 1998).

Efficacy and Key Indicators

Research demonstrates that most detention alternative programs determine efficacy of the program and achieve short and long term goals through key indicators. Before we turn our attention to Lancaster County's Detention Alternatives, it is important to examine the standards and best practices established by the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the key indicators or goals that programs generally set. An examination of detention alternatives across the country reveals four common goals or indicators. Programs measure their success and are often evaluated using these standards: community-based supervision, establishing or enhancing positive relationships, developing new skills, and the reduction of repeat law violations. The first three of these standards are discussed briefly below, while a section of this evaluation has been devoted to recidivism.

One of the short term goals common among all detention alternatives is increased supervision of youth in a setting less restrictive than detention. The reasons for this are generally twofold: to ensure that the youth appears in court /does not abscond and to help the youth from breaking the law prior to appearing in court again. It is unclear why this time frame (post arrest and pre adjudication) appears to be a high risk time for youth, but it may involve a loss of hope and feelings of failure. Increased supervision is a critical short term goal for any detention alternative, but involves ancillary benefits as well. For example, McBride & Vanderwaal (1997) studied Day Reporting Programs in Cook County, Illinois, and demonstrated that the supervision provided by reporting to a center can be effective at reducing participants' drug use, arrests on new charges, and increasing court appearances.

A second common characteristic of effective detention alternatives is frequent contact with youth beyond the facility. Austin, Johnson & Weitzer's (2005) analysis further indicated

that community settings were found to be more effective environment for reducing recidivism than institutional settings. Fostering a meaningful connection within the community and building relationships is an important element of effective detention alternatives. Prior research indicates that detention alternatives often provide “continuous monitoring for a substantial period of time,” and their contact with the youth includes monitoring several aspects of the juvenile’s life while providing rehabilitative services (Austin, Johnson & Weitzer 2005, pg. 21).

Programs that were the most effective combined substantial levels of supervision with skill-building programs. According to an analysis of 443 juvenile programs studied, the most successful alternatives to detention offered programs that focus on employment, skills training and behavior change along with multimodal treatment methods. Helping youth learn a new skill appears to be one of the most effective detention alternatives. Nationwide these are often employment skills training that ends in placement with an employer. Through these programs, juveniles acquire hands-on training and education. “Fresh Start” in Baltimore, Maryland provides hands-on training and education to juvenile offenders. The program offers employment skills and training targeting practical skills such as carpentry and boat repair. According to a follow-up study of the “Fresh Start” program, program participants between 1997 and 2000 had a re-arrest rate of nineteen percent and are-incarceration rate of seven percent, whereas participants in other Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice programs had the re-arrest rate of seventy five percent (Austin, Johnson & Weitzer, 2005).

Lancaster County's Detention Alternatives

In 2009, the juvenile justice coordinator recommended 209 youth for placement in a Lancaster County Detention Alternative (LCDA) in lieu of the Detention Center. This represents a 31% decrease from the prior year. Of the youth referred in 2009, 33% were sent to CEDARS Evening Reporting Center; 27% were referred to CEDARS Evening Reporting Center; 21% went to Project HIRE, and 19% were referred to BEST (not included in this evaluation).

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of youth placed in Detention Alternatives	179	117	117	189	304	209

Table 1: Number of Youth Placed in LCDAs

II. Lancaster County's Detention Alternatives Are Alternatives Keeping Youth Out of Detention?

In addition to the alternatives listed above, Lancaster County also uses electronic monitoring and home detention. The Institute was asked to evaluate four juvenile justice programs, only three of which are considered true detention alternatives. Although Juvenile Diversion is included in this evaluation, it is generally considered a quasi-prevention program or strategy and not a detention alternative. For all practical purposes, in the state of Nebraska diversion would never be an alternative to detention.

As part of the Lancaster County Community Capacity Inventory, each of the programs evaluated identified risk factors that they address through their programming. A comprehensive list of risks identified for each program can be found in the Appendices. The top risk factors addressed did not differ much across the four juvenile justice programs. As the table illustrates below, 100% of the programs evaluated responded that “negative peer interactions” was a primary risk factor addressed by their program.

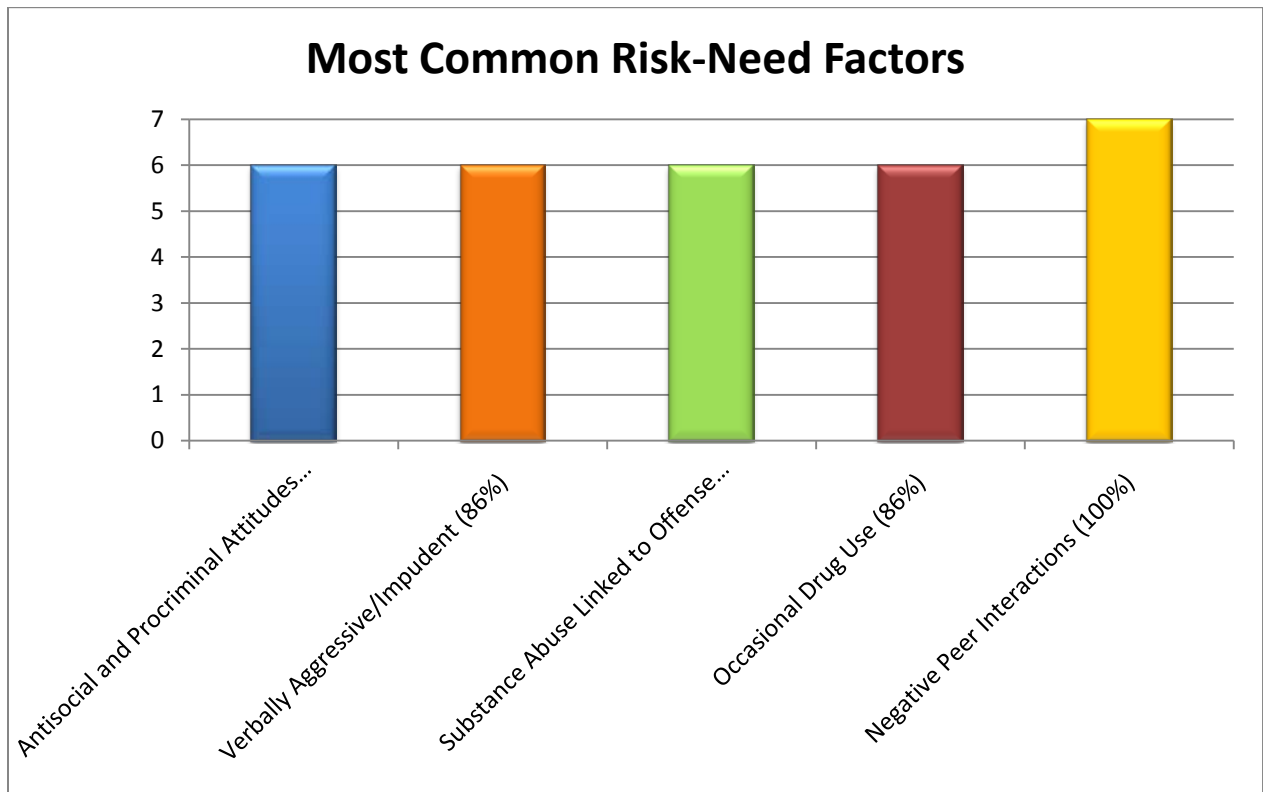


Table 2: Risk Factors Addressed Through Programming

Juvenile Detention

Below each alternative is discussed in detail. Before examining the efficacy of detention alternatives specific to Lancaster County, it is useful to look at the population that we hope to impact. In 2009, a total of 955 young people resided in the Lancaster County Juvenile Detention Youth Services Center (704 male, 251 female). The average age of a youth in the Lancaster County facility during this time was 16 years of age. Not all youth in detention are eligible for referral to a detention alternative. In 2009, 104 youth were in detention on contract from another county. Another 79 youth were admitted through County/ Adult Court, and were not charged as juveniles. Although the Detention Expediter is able to help a youth in adult court get into

community corrections, in a one year pilot, only one youth was discharged from detention this way.

This is important to recognize because not all of the youth in detention have an opportunity to go through an alternative. One of the policy questions that should be taken up by Lancaster County, but is beyond the scope of the current evaluation, is whether more youth should be eligible for the alternatives/ community release and if so, what obstacles exist to accomplishing their release to the community. For purposes of this evaluation, we examined only youth filed on in Juvenile Court. From a practical standpoint these are the only youth eligible for release to a detention alternative. Of the 955 who resided in the facility, 895 youth were admitted to detention in 2009. Of those, only 474 came through the doors of the Lancaster County Separate Juvenile Court. Of the 474, 29% were for new law violations (that did not involve a violation). This does not mean that it is a first offense for the youth, who may have gone through the system on a prior occasion and already be adjudicated and off probation. This figure only tells us that a new law offense was the primary reason for the admission in 2009.

Technical violations constitute the two next most common reasons for admission in 2009: 27% of youth violated a home detention order, 17% violated terms of their probation, and 7% violated terms and conditions related to an electronic monitor. Data provided by the Lancaster County Youth Services provides a detailed account of the technical violations of youth admitted in 2009. Of the 126 who violated their home detention order:

- 32.5% (41 youth) were caught using drugs or had a failed Urinalysis (UA).
- 26% (33 youth) violated their home detention order by demonstrating problematic behaviors at school,
- 12 % (16 youth) used alcohol while on home detention which resulted in re-admission to the detention facility.
- 8.7% (11 youth) absconded

Of the multitude of ways youth violated home detention, only 15% of youth on home detention violated the order by committing a new law violation. These data are critical to review, especially in light of key indicators and best practices. Clearly, it is important for detention alternatives to work to prevent new law violations, assist youth with school issues and attempt to address any drug and alcohol use. Not only are these key indicators that successful programs use nationwide, they are also the most common reasons youth are admitted and / or re-admitted to detention in Lancaster County.

Release Destinations

In the absence of other data, it might be asked whether a review of release destinations reveals anything about the relationship between detention and detention alternatives. After all, the Nebraska Juvenile Code does not allow the use of detention for punitive purposes. Youth should only be in detention when community security or their own security requires it. Youth should remain in detention only until an alternative plan for securing the community and their personal safety can be implemented. One would reasonably expect that referrals to detention alternatives reflect the system's confidence that the programs provide unique supports to stabilize a youth in the community.

Unfortunately, detention alternatives in Lancaster County are often not informed of the youth's risk level or offenses. Consequently, without risk assessment data and knowledge of prior offenses, placements and detention, release destinations are a poor proxy of a youth's risk to self or others. Of the youth processed through Lancaster County Juvenile Court in 2009, were released as follows:

- 40% released to home/ relative with services
- 30.8 % were committed to the Office of Juvenile Services
- 12.9 % were placed in Kearney
- 4.6% were released to Juvenile Drug Court

- 2.8 % were placed in Geneva
- 2.7 % went into drug treatment facilities
- 2.0 % were committed to the Foster Care system

Notwithstanding that the majority of youth appear to have been stabilized in setting less restrictive than detention , we cannot extrapolate relative risk levels based upon placement. In order to determine if detention is being used appropriately and whether the alternatives to detention reduce the need for detention, Lancaster County must be able to discern the correspondence between individual risk scores and placement decisions.

Specific data is not collected anywhere in Lancaster County's system on the number of days a pre-adjudicated youth waits in detention before being released home. Nor is reliable data collected on the number of days that youth using alternatives spent in detention. It is unclear whether detention alternatives are carefully matched to the stability needs of youth coming out of detention, or, in the alternative, that youth are simply plugged into detention alternatives because it's better than nothing. The documentation essential to answering these questions must be created as part of the ordinary course of the juvenile justice system process if the county hopes to answer the first evaluation question: "Are alternatives keeping youth out of detention and thereby saving taxpayers' dollars?"

THE DETENTION ALTERNATIVES

I. Are Lancaster County's detention alternative programs using "evidence based models" and, if so, have they been implemented with fidelity?

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Model Programs Guide (MPG) was developed to assist practitioners and communities in implementing evidence-based programs. "The MPG database of evidence-based programs covers the entire continuum of youth services from prevention through sanctions to reentry" (www2.dsgonline.com/mpg). Some evidence-based models are practice that could be applied to any program. For instance, cultural competence or programming that impacts disproportionate minority contact would apply to any program, even those beyond the scope of juvenile justice. The majority of evidence-based research must be examined on a program-by-program basis. To determine whether Lancaster County Detention Alternatives employ model programs, the OJJDP database was queried, then programs were interviewed and surveyed. Each of the alternatives is evaluated and discussed individually in the upcoming pages.

Juvenile Diversion Services

Youth are generally offered diversion when a city or county attorney determines that the offense(s) committed is diversion eligible. This is early on in the process and considered an alternative to the juvenile justice system, which includes detention at the far end of the continuum. Diversion services generally cannot immediately impact or reduce days a youth spends in detention. Indirectly and over time, however, diversion can impact a youth by preventing his or her further involvement in the juvenile justice system.

The services offered by Lancaster County Juvenile Diversion include: educational groups, one to one meetings, prevention, tobacco education / cessation group, drug testing,

screening for high risk behaviors, and referrals based upon screening results. As part of the Lancaster County Community Capacity Inventory, Diversion identified a number of YLS/CMI risk-need factors that are addressed through their programming. Some of these risk factors*

Diversion addresses include:

1. Family Circumstances/Parenting

Inconsistent parenting

Poor relations with parent(s)

2. Education/Employment

Disruptive behavior at school

Low achievement

Truancy

3. Peer Relations

Negative peer interactions

4. Substance Abuse

Occasional drug use

Chronic drug/alcohol use

Substance abuse interferes with life and/or linked to offense(s)

5. Leisure/Recreation

No personal interests

Table 3: Risk Factor Addressed by Juvenile Diversion

*(A comprehensive list of risk factors identified for youth in Juvenile Diversion can be found in the Appendix A).

Capacity and Demographics:

In 2009, a total of 903 youth were referred to Diversion; of these 758, or 84%, enrolled. One mechanism for preventing youth from penetrating deeper into the system is to allow flexibility, and an opportunity to learn from mistakes. Of the 903 enrolled, 8.5% had been enrolled in diversion before and were being given a second opportunity to complete the program successfully. Of the 595 youth that discharged and completed the program in 2009, 443 (74%) were successful and graduated out of the juvenile justice system. One hundred fifty-two (152)

youth failed to complete the program and many of these youth moved deeper into the juvenile justice system.

Key Detention Alternative Indicators

Although diversion is not strictly a detention alternative, as an alternative to the justice system, some of the key indicators established for detention alternatives hold true for diversion. Reduction or elimination of drug or alcohol use; prevention of new law offenses; and gaining new skills (social, vocational, or educational) are common goals of almost all juvenile justice programs.

Indicator I: Reduced Use of Drugs/ Alcohol

Diversion conducts random urinalysis to discourage drug and alcohol use by youth enrolled in the program. If a youth is determined to be using, the program will determine the consequence “on a case-by-case basis depending upon the level of care the client is currently receiving and whether or not a use pattern has been established by the client while in the program” (response to email questions). Often the level of supervision, or intervention, is increased.

Indicator II: Reduction of New Law Violations

Occasionally a youth will not comply, and his or her diversion agreement is terminated. Of the clients enrolled in the program in 2009, 152 did not complete the program. Of these, 82 committed a law violation while enrolled. While this represents 54% of the youth terminated, it is only 10% of the youth enrolled. Another important element is the timeframe in which a new law violation occurs. Youth appear less likely to commit a new offense the longer they remained enrolled in the program. As Table 4 demonstrates, 55% of new law offenses occurred while youth were in the first few months of enrollment.

Duration of Enrollment	Number of Offenders
Less than 30 days	16
Between 1 month and 2 months	25
Between 2 months and 3 months	14
Between 3 months and 4 months	8
Between 4 months and 5 months	4
More than 5 months	5

Table 4: Offending Patterns while Enrolled in Juvenile Diversion Services

Indicator III: Increased Skills / Asset Building

Research demonstrates that youth with the most Developmental Assets are least likely to engage in patterns of high-risk behavior (Search 2009). Successful programs generally focus on constellations of Assets, or specific Assets. Unless an agency has massive amounts of resources, no one program can truly focus on all 40 Assets. Unfortunately, given the tense financial climate a number of agencies who responded to the Lancaster County Community Capacity Survey selected far more assets than they could possibly focus on in-depth. A complete list of the 40 Developmental Assets can be found in the Appendix

When Assets are fostered intentionally and in-depth, the prevention capacity is clear. According to surveys of over 200,000 youth nationwide, those with the fewest Assets were the most likely to engage illicit drug and alcohol use, violence, and unsafe sexual activity (Table 5).

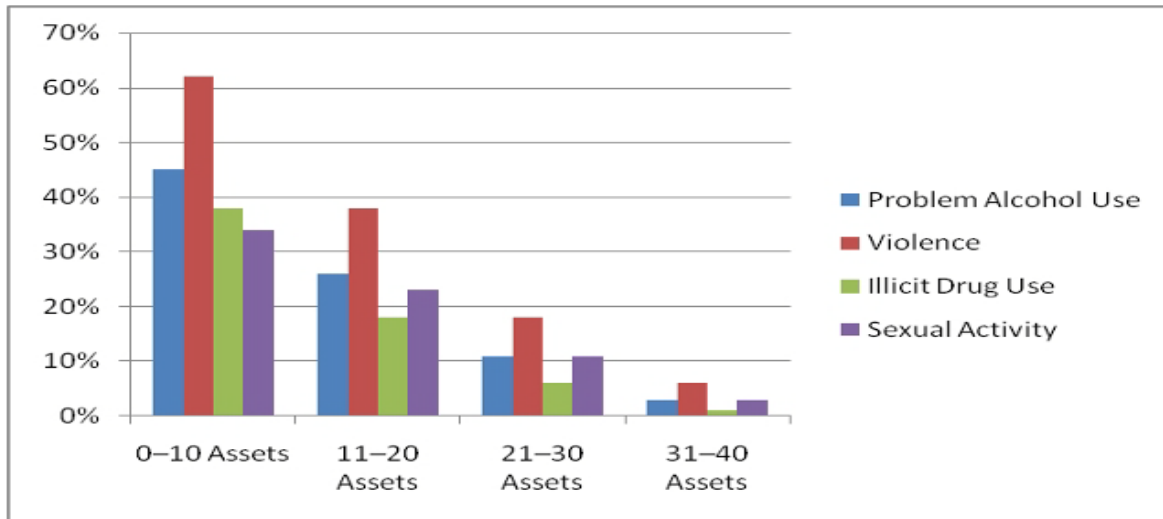


Table 5: Search Institute Protective Aspect of Assets

Diversion identified more than twenty Assets that they work actively to cultivate. These include:

- Increasing a young person’s support from a caring adult,
- Helping families maintain healthy and appropriate boundaries,
- Teaching youth to have high expectations for themselves and others.
- Teaching youth to tell the truth, even when it is difficult to do so
- Requiring young people to accept personal responsibility for their actions.

Model Programs and Best Practices Employed:

As a final evaluative element, programs were asked about the evidence-based practices or “model programs” they employ. Although some of the best-practices curriculum used by Diversion are not adopted and/ or implemented with fidelity, this is generally due to lack of resources, not a lack of knowledge about best practices. Often curricula are revised in such a way that makes it substantially compliant with the model practice. The Diversion program implements at least three OJJDP Model programs with a variant range of fidelity. The three OJJDP Programs include: Teen Court, Restorative Justice, and Truancy Prevention Programs.

As can be seen in Table 7, Lancaster County implements five of the six best-practice elements identified for Teen Courts.

OJJDP Model Practices for Teen Court	
Strategy Employed	Model Program employed
Immediate Sanction	Yes
Classes for Decision Making Skills	Yes
Classes on Victim Awareness	No
Restitution	Yes
Community Service	Yes
Formal Written Apology	Yes
Service on Subsequent Teen Court Jury	Yes

Table 7: Model Practices for Teen Court - Diversion Strategies

Under restorative justice strategies, Diversion does not employ quite as many of the evidence-based programs identified by OJJDP. As portrayed in Table 8, Diversion uses two of the six restorative justice strategies. Areas that could be expanded upon in both Teen Court and as a Restorative Justice practice include Victim Awareness or Victim-Offender panels.

OJJDP Model Practices for Restorative Justice Programs	
Strategy Employed	Model Program employed
Mediation	No
Conflict Resolution	Yes
Family Group Conferencing	No
Victim –Offender Mediation	Yes
Victim Impact Panels	No

Table 8: Model Practices for Restorative Justice Programs - JDS Strategies

Diversion also focuses on educational skills and monitors weekly the attendance of all eligible youth enrolled in the Juvenile Diversion Program. If a youth has any truancy issues, they are then enrolled in a phase system that begins with a conference with the youth, parents and the school. Services provided may include: (a) monitoring attendance and grades; (b)

meeting with parent/guardian to discuss more specific interventions; (c) onsite tutoring and homework time; (d) meeting with parent/guardian and school personnel to discuss further interventions/sanctions; (e) reporting to diversion daily if under school suspension and/or expulsion. If the juvenile has dropped out of school, the program requires the juvenile to work toward earning a GED. Of the eight truancy prevention practices outlined by OJJDP as “best-practices,” Diversion identified five as currently employed in their program.

OJJDP Model Practices for Truancy Prevention Programs	
Strategy Employed	Model Program employed
Parenting Education	Yes
Homework Hotlines	No
Parent Liaison	No
Zero Tolerance for Truancy	Yes
Community-Run Detention Center	No
Parent-Teacher Communication Enhancement	Yes
Law Enforcement Participation	Yes
Dealing with Root Causes (mentoring, academic, parental involvement, tutoring)	Yes

Table 9: Model Practices for Truancy Prevention - JDS Strategies

Efficacy as a Deterrent to the Juvenile Justice System:

Juvenile Diversion appears to be effective in slowing a youth’s progression to the next level of the juvenile justice system. Juvenile Diversion has access to the Nebraska Criminal Justice Information System (NCJIS) and is able to run follow-up checks on youth who complete the program. It is the only program that was able to provide recidivism data. Of the 556 youth that graduated in 2007, 138 had received another citation when data was examined in 2008. Data could not be obtained on 28 youth. Of the 138 youth who reoffended, 80 youth progressed to the next level of the juvenile justice system and were placed on Probation, 22 paid a fine, 6 cases were dismissed and 2 youth went through Diversion an additional time (Intensive Diversion

Services.) According to this data, only 14 % of graduated youth entered further into the system and an order was issued by the Juvenile Court placing them on Juvenile Probation.

Project HIRE

Project HIRE (Helping Improve Readiness for Employment) is a 16-week program designed for youth ages 16-18 that are in need of employment skills. The program was developed in 2001 as part of Lancaster County’s Detention Alternatives. Referrals come primarily from Juvenile Probation. The goal of this program is for youth to work through a comprehensive employment readiness curriculum designed to identify potential barriers to employment, and to teach problem solving skills so that youth may better deal with situations as they arise. The program consists of three phases: job readiness training, job searching, and an eight-week supervised employment phase.

Project HIRE identified a number of Youth Service Inventory risk-need factors that they address through their programming, including:

- 1. Education/Employment**
 - Unemployment
 - Low achievement
 - Not Seeking Employment
- 2. Peer Relations**
 - Lack of positive peer interactions
 - Negative peer interactions
- 3. Leisure/Recreation**
 - No personal interests
 - Limited organizational activities
 - Could make better use of time
- 4. Personality/Behavior**

Poor frustration tolerance

Verbally aggressive/impudent

5. Attitudes/Orientation

Antisocial and/or pro-criminal attitudes

Actively rejecting help

Defies authority

Little concern for others

Table 10: Risk Factor Addressed by Juvenile Project HIRE

Capacity and Demographics:

In 2009, a total of 42 youth were sent to Project HIRE from Lancaster County Juvenile Probation, all of the youth enrolled. Thirteen youth completed 100%, or all three phases of the employment program. Data is unavailable about the level of program completion that the remaining 29 youth completed. Limited data makes it unclear, but it appears that 26 of the youth did not complete the program.

Key Detention Alternative Indicators

Indicator I: Reduced Drug/ Alcohol

Project HIRE does not specifically address substance abuse in its programming nor does it conduct UAs on youth enrolled. The curriculum does not appear to address drug and alcohol use with this population. Although a youth may attend drug and alcohol education in another detention alternative, or may be UA tested through Probation, an employment curriculum should contain information related to drug or alcohol use and employment situations. Reduction or elimination of drug or alcohol use is one of three key indicators for a detention alternative and Lancaster County can make their programs more effective by ensuring it is incorporated into Project HIRE.

Indicator II: Reduction of New Law Violations

Preventing new law offenses while awaiting a court date is one short term goal common of all detention alternative programs. Reduction of illegal behaviors is generally also the long

term goal. One key way to accomplish both the short and long term goals is to ensure that youth remain engaged, enrolled and attending a program. “The degree to which an intervention fully engages a youth determines whether that intervention has a chance of succeeding” (Robinson 2007). Of the youth who started Project HIRE, a significant number of youth, 26 youth (62%) failed to complete the program. According to interviews and surveys, it appears that some of the youth just stop attending, however this does not mean that those youth necessarily end up deeper in the system, as will be discussed in the “Efficacy Section” below.

Indicator III: Increased Skills / Asset Building

According to the Community Capacity Inventory, Project HIRE works diligently to facilitate an environment where youth are valued members of the community, and are seen as important resources and participants in the community. Programs that successfully achieve this often have a lifelong impact on a juvenile and impact a number of detrimental patterns (Search Institute 2009).

External Assets

- ✓ Other adult relationships: the young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
- ✓ Community values youth: the young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
- ✓ Youth as resources: young people are given useful roles in the community.
- ✓ Adult role models: parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
- ✓ High expectations: both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Internal Assets

- ✓ Achievement Motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school.
- ✓ Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
- ✓ Honesty—Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”
- ✓ Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
- ✓ Cultural Competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

-
- ✓ Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

 - ✓ Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”

 - ✓ Sense of purpose—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”

 - ✓ Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

Table 11: Development Assets Facilitated in Project HIRE

Model Programs and Best Practices Employed:

Our research uncovered a number of evidence-based employment skill programs from around the country. Several are identified by the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) administered by the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC). According to Murphy, Rose & Sullivan (2001), these include:

- Career Exploration Project (CEXP), Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), New York, New York.
- Crispus Attucks Youth Build, Crispus Attucks Community Development Corporation, York, Pennsylvania.
- Gulf Coast Trades Center, New Waverly, Texas

In addition, the Community Restitution and Apprenticeship Focused Training program (project CRAFT), started in Bismarck, North Dakota, Nashville, Tennessee, and Sabillasville, Maryland in 1994 by the Home Builders Institute (HBI), yielded positive results such as a high rate of job placement for the program graduates, and the decrease of recidivism rates for the participants. The recidivism rates for the program participants at the three locations were twenty six percent, which was significantly lower compared to the national rate of seventy percent (Hamilton & McKinney, 1999). The Culinary Education and Training Program for At-Risk Youth was initiated in Florida and has been particularly effective in engaging youth in the

program, having a seventy percent retention rate. Data was not available on re-arrest, re-incarceration and recidivism rates of program participants (Brunson & Smith, 2001).

Project HIRE implements only some of the elements identified by OJJDP as Model elements. As can be seen in Table 12, Lancaster County implements three of the seven best-practice elements identified for Employment Skills Programs.

OJJDP Model Practices for Employment Skills Programs	
Strategy Employed	MP adopted by Project Hire
Academic resources / tutoring	Yes
Vocational training	No
Tools for Independent Living	Yes
Education on Health Care	No
Job Counseling	Yes
Specific Skill Enhancement (computer, construction)	No
Social Skills Training	No

Table 12: Model Practices for Employment Programs

Many programs recognized by the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet), appear to focus on specific trades. Project HIRE may want to consider their dropout rate and inquire about curriculum or vocational tracking that will keep youth more engaged in the program. Areas that have demonstrated success around the county include the culinary arts, partnerships with the Home Builders Association, and other trade school alliances.

Efficacy as a Deterrent

An important goal for all detention alternative programs is their ability to deter youth from further involvement in the juvenile justice system, both while they are awaiting court and long-term. It was difficult for the Institute to access the effectiveness of Project HIRE, given the limited amount of data collected by the program or the referral system.

As part of this evaluation, youth names and dates of enrollment were provided to staff of Lancaster County Youth Services, to determine if the youth had further contacts with detention. Of the 43 youth who were referred to Project HIRE in 2009, 16 or 37% were placed in the

detention center at some point post their enrollment date. It is unclear, however, because no data was available on youth who did not complete the program, whether the youth who were re-detained ever really engaged with the program. This statistic has limited usefulness. First, it may be that these youth never completed the program, so their re-offense pattern would have little to do with the efficacy of the program. Secondly, placement in detention is not truly a recidivism analysis; it only informs us of the youth who committed a serious enough violation or new offense to be re-detained. Thirdly, this number does not capture any of the youth who re-offended but were not re-detained. Finally, it does not even hint at the number of youth who might have broken the law but were not caught. These limitations will be taken up at length in the section entitled Recidivism.

Day and Evening Reporting

Day and Evening Reporting programs are generally treated as the same type of programs since they are conceptually indistinguishable (Austin, Johnson & Weitzer, 2005); consequently we have combined our discussion of these two alternatives as they exist in Lancaster County. Almost all Reporting Centers are non-residential detention alternatives that require juvenile offenders to report their activities to case managers on a daily basis (<http://www2.dsgonline.com/mpg/>). Most of these programs consist of services like drug treatment, job training referrals, life skills training, and counseling.

Lancaster County's Day and Evening Reporting provide a structured environment during unsupervised periods of the day so that youth may remain in their home. "The day program (8:00am -3:00pm) is generally utilized for youth who have been suspended or expelled from school or are in need of additional supervision while transitioning back into the home," while the evening "program (2:00pm – 8:00pm) is generally utilized for youth who make poor choices

and are in need of additional supervision” (Appendix). Youth are expected to engage in community service work, academic tutoring, peer discussion groups, GED preparation, pro social activities, job searching /readiness training and life development workshops. The center emphasizes the philosophy of positive reinforcements and asset building to encourage new, healthier behaviors and major accomplishments.

Day and Evening Reporting identified over thirty (30) Youth Service Inventory risk-need factors that they address through their programming (see Appendix). Their programming focuses intentionally on:

- **Recovering school credit** through APEX e-Learning. Apex is the distance eLearning program used by Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) for the purposes of credit recovery.
- **Establishing healthy relationships** with family and community members,
- **Improving decision making** including emotional and behavioral management, commitment of change, and new survival skills which will reprogram the mind with personal power.
- **Reducing high risk behaviors** such as gang involvement, substance use, and negative peer interaction.
- **Improving self efficacy** to include self esteem and diversity, and
- **Cognitive development** with specific focus on reducing cognitive distortions that lead to lying, stealing, aggressive conduct, opposition-defiance, assuming the worst, minimizing/mislabeling (See Appendix).

Capacity and Demographics for Day & Evening Reporting:

In 2009, a total of 64 youth were referred to CEDARS Day Reporting by Lancaster County Juvenile Probation; 2 of the youth had completed the program before. Forty-six youth, or 72%, completed all of the recommendations and completed the program successfully. In 2009, 68 youth were referred to CEDARS Day Reporting by Lancaster County Juvenile Probation; 9 (13%) of the youth had completed the program before. It appears that roughly 70% of youth successfully completed the program, but data submitted was incomplete.

Forty-five youth completed all of the recommendations and completed the program successfully. Of the youth who started Day and Evening reporting, a range of 21 to 28% failed to complete the program.

Key Detention Alternative Indicators

Indicator I: Reduced Drug/ Alcohol

CEDARS Day and Evening Reporting Centers complete a Substance Abuse Screening Instrument, the BERS and the MAYSI-2 (Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument - Second Version) for all youth referred to these programs. Depending upon the screening results, youth may be referred for individual counseling, or drug and alcohol treatment. In addition, youth who attend the Center routinely attend drug and alcohol education.

Indicator II: Reduction of New Law Violations

Preventing new law offenses while awaiting a court date is one short term goal common to all detention alternative programs. Because of the increased supervision, Day and Evening Reporting Centers are instrumental in reducing a youth's opportunity to re-offend. Of the 68 youth enrolled in Evening Reporting in 2009, 22% (15 youth) did not complete the program. No data is available on whether this was due to a new law violation. Similarly, 28% (18 of the 64 youth enrolled) did not complete the Day Reporting Program. Again, it is unclear if any of these youth was re-detained or committed an offense while enrolled. A critical piece of information for any reporting facility to collect is whether enrolled youth violated the law while enrolled. Other interesting data elements would include the dates, times and locations of subsequent law violations.

Indicator III: Increased Skills / Asset Building

Day and Evening Reporting indicated that they actively cultivate all but one of the 40 Developmental Assets. Because these programs refer youth out, it is likely that they included Assets that they cultivate through referral. Beginning in March of 2010, the Reporting Center began utilizing the 40 Developmental Assets Instrument developed by the Search Institute. This instrument assesses external and internal assets. Youth complete a pre and post assessment of these assets. Staff develop an individualized plan based upon low asset scores.

Model Programs and Best Practices Employed:

Our research uncovered a number of evidence-based day and evening reporting centers across the county. Similar to other alternatives, the short-term goals include improvement of court appearance rates and the reduction of new crimes committed by offenders during the pre-adjudication period. (McBride & VanderWaal, 1997; Bahn & Davis, 1998). Day Reporting programs should document youth outcomes. For instance, in Cook County, Illinois, the Day Reporting Center reduced participants' drug use, reduced arrests on new charges, and increased court appearances (McBride & Vanderwaal, 1997). The program also resulted in lower recidivism rates for the treatment group. While slightly more than half of the treatment group was rearrested within one year after being discharged from the Cook County Day Reporting Center, almost three quarters of the control group were rearrested during the same period (Lurigio, Martin & Olson, 2003). The Lancaster County program must document the outcomes for youth if they are to be measured using these best-practices standards.

Day and Evening Reporting do implement some of the elements identified by OJJDP as Model elements. As can be seen in Table 13, Lancaster County implements five of the nine strategies recommended by OJJDP.

Strategy Employed	Model Program employed
Individual/ Group Counseling	No
Vocational training	No
Recreation	Yes
Educational	Yes
Substance Abuse treatment	No
Cognitive Skills	Yes
Community Resource Referrals	Yes
Weekday Supervision	Yes
Weekend Supervision*	No

Table 13: Model Practices for Day and Evening Programs

*Supervision will be scheduled for Saturdays beginning early Fall 2010.

Many programs recognized by the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet),

Efficacy as a Deterrent

An important goal for all detention alternative programs is their ability to deter youth from further involvement in the juvenile justice system, both while they are awaiting court and long-term. It was difficult for the Institute to access the effectiveness of Day and Evening Reporting capacity to deter future involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system. No recidivism data was available on youth who completed the program.

Community Perception

A community's level of confidence is a critical element for detention alternative programs to be successful. If referral sources do not feel confident that youth will be well supervised and deterred from juvenile delinquency, they will be less likely to release offenders into the community and more likely to commit youth to secure detention facilities.

The Juvenile Justice Institute set out to ascertain the community's level of confidence using a web-based, anonymous survey. A link to a brief questionnaire was emailed to juvenile justice professionals who have contact with Lancaster County's Detention Alternatives, including: prosecutors, public defenders, juvenile probations officers, and juvenile judges. A total of nine responses were received (out of 47), representing a 19% response rate. Five of the surveys provided comments with regard to Juvenile Diversion; two responses were for Day Reporting. The Evening Reporting Program and Project HIRE received only one response each. A qualitative data analysis program (MAXQDA10) was utilized to thematically analyze respondents' comments to open-ended questions. MAXQDA is a computer software program that analyzes qualitative data like interview and survey responses from open-ended questions, simple texts and documents, and multimedia files.

Respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with the program, whether they are a referral source, and changes they would recommend for the program. Of the 9 juvenile justice professionals who responded to the survey, 78% indicated they had concerns with how programs were being implemented. Eight out of nine responses (90%) indicated changes they would like to see within Lancaster County Alternatives. These comments have been grouped thematically below.

Policy and ideological differences within the juvenile justice system happen. Unfortunately, many systems struggle with these but never address them directly. Comments like the following reflect this tension: “The program at times appears to be an information gathering agency for the county attorney who then uses the information against the juvenile.” Another comment raises the issue of just how challenging programming should be: “We still hear families say going to court is ‘easier’ than what would be expected of them while in diversion.” Some comments demonstrate a lack of communication between the program and the referral source. The “Program needs to be tiered, or graduated, or more individualized. A twelve year old shoplifter can have essentially the same plan as a seventeen year old charged with assault.” Another respondent indicated that the “Diversion program needs to be expanded to allow youth more than one opportunity in the program.” A similar comment was that “Youth who complete diversion and later receive another law violation are not able to complete diversion again or may be allowed in a more intensive diversion program for even minor offenses.” Many of the comments indicated a lack of information sharing and coordination regarding specific program requirements: “I am not sure what they do on whom, I have heard some things but I would like to know the specific policies on who they serve and what they do with each group.” Another respondent was equally unclear about program requirements: “I would also like to know how they define success.”

Comments reflected a need to standardize practices regarding eligibility: “Some offenses are listed as ‘eligible’ offenses but prosecutors will refuse to refer no matter what the circumstances are, i.e., third degree sexual assault.” Juvenile justice professionals often exercise discretion in the cases they handle, but evidence-based models indicate that standardized intake procedures *should be utilized* to prevent inconsistent results like the following comment

indicates: “City Attorney and County Attorney have different requirements, so there is no consistency which can mean that co-defendants or similarly situated youth are treated differently.”

A final area of concern that is raised via these community perceptions includes funding for programs. One respondent felt that the “fee is supposed to be waivable, but this is not readily discussed with families, causing some to not follow through on the referral. Also if a youth has two charges, he can be charged with two fees.” Another wrote that “I think families still find the fees and excessive requirements to be barriers.” Fees can undeniably be an obstacle to accessing a community alternative, especially when the service is more expensive than appearing for court. However, data regarding the number of fees that have been waived, the number of youth who refuse diversion because of the fee and the number of fees “written off” should be shared with the juvenile justice community, so that the economic realities to the family, program, and the community are clearly understood and judiciously weighed.

When asked specifically about changes they would make to the alternative programs, some asked for community input and evaluation: “More community stakeholder involvement and feedback. Data reports, evaluation of the effectiveness on programming.” Other comments were specific to the program: “I would like to see more community type services coming from this program. I realize that they are smaller in number of youth, but I think 2 days of scheduled community service would be beneficial. We hear questions from parents, what is my kid doing? Can they help this part of town with cleanup?” Another recommendation involved “Lower fees. Remember that these are generally first time offenders. It seems to me they are burdened with excessive requirements at times.” Others recognize the need for better communication: “Clear communication with probation about youth attendance. Expanding the hours in the evening

would also be beneficial for youth that are not able to get there immediately after school.” As we will take up in our recommendations, despite the relatively few responses, it is clear that Lancaster County could benefit from clearer communication *within* the juvenile justice system. First, we will briefly touch upon recidivism as an evaluation mechanism.

Recidivism / Youth Stability Reporting Instrument

Recidivism is commonly defined as “a tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior, especially, criminal behavior” (www. merriam-webster.com). In juvenile detention alternative programs, recidivism is often a barometer that agencies, or their funders, examine to gauge the effectiveness of a program. The practical application and definition of recidivism varies tremendously by jurisdiction and individual programs. For some detention alternative programs, recidivism is defined as the re-arrest rate, while in others a youth has “re-offended” only when they are found guilty or are re-incarcerated for an offense. Others have a much lower threshold and define “re-offense” as simply being stopped by law enforcement, or cited for a crime.

The time at which re-offenses are examined also varies tremendously. Most agencies track program participants who successfully completed program requirements for a specific period of time, ranging from six months to three years. Agencies outside Lancaster County have also been known to report recidivism data while juvenile offenders are still participating in a program (Chamberlain & Reid, 1998; Martin, Lurigio & Olson, 2003; Austin, Johnson & Weitzer, 2005; Patrick & Marsh, 2005). Clearly these are different yardsticks to measure by and yield different results. Any jurisdiction that plans to utilize recidivism as part of routine program evaluation should establish a common definition, timeline, and agreed upon process so that each program is evaluated uniformly.

Nationwide, many jurisdictions have established definitions of recidivism that detention alternative programs are using to evaluate their programs.

- Day Reporting Centers in Cook County, Chicago, Illinois, determine that a youth has re-offended if the youth is arrested or incarcerated after completion of the juvenile

offenders' program. They conduct this follow-up with youth twelve months post program completion.

- Life skills training programs in Fresh Start, in Baltimore, Maryland, also examine re-arrest and re-incarceration as measures of recidivism, but they follow up with youth three years after program completion.
- Nationwide, juvenile diversion programs tend to define recidivism as the issuance of a new citation, and follow-up varies from two to three years post program completion.
- The Group Care and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care in Oregon has adopted perhaps the most in-depth measure of recidivism. The Oregon Youth Authority's official criminal referral data includes misdemeanor and felony offenses as well as self-reported delinquency (post program completion). Criminal referral data is collected at two intervals: one year pre-baseline period/from program placement to one year post-program discharge or expulsion. Interestingly, self-report data is also collected from youth in two six-month intervals during the post-completion period.

Many studies have been conducted with regard to juvenile offenders and recidivism. In those studies recidivism is frequently defined as the "rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration." The follow-up period in those studies ranged from one year to five years (Steiner, Cauffman & Duxbury, 1999; Loughran, Mulvey, Schubert, Fagan, Piquero & Losoya, 2009; Tennyson, 2009; Hagan, Anderson, Caldwell & Kemper, 2010; Mulder, Brand, Bullens & Van Male, 2010).

Despite the fact that recidivism is often used as the "gold standard" of juvenile justice programming, there are a number of flaws with using recidivism as a sole measure of

programmatic success or failure. First, as indicated above, finding a common definition must be an agreed upon community-level discussion. Secondly, many programs simply do not have access to the information needed to measure recidivism. For purposes of this study, Detention Alternative Programs were asked to run background checks on the youth to determine if new offenses have been committed. Only one program had access to this information. Even when programs do have access, the results are limited; they do not really tell us whether a youth re-offended – only whether our system caught a youth re-offending. In addition, re-offense data tells us almost nothing about *why* a youth is subsequently in trouble with the law. In addition, juvenile justice programs are often held accountable for youth that re-offend, and programs are deemed ineffectual if they cannot prevent youth from re-offending. In reality, programs that work with the toughest youth will likely have the lowest success rates and the highest re-offense occurrence. It is important, therefore, to incorporate other measures in addition to recidivism.

Youth Stability Reporting Instrument

In the fall of 2009, the Institute began utilizing a tool designed to capture the relative stability of youth as they enter and exit our juvenile justice programs. The Youth Stability Reporting Instrument (YSRI) is an intuitive, straight forward assessment designed to quickly measure the level of stability a youth is experiencing across eight different domains. Research indicates that instability across any of these domains increases the likelihood that a youth will engage in acts of delinquency. Lancaster County Detention Alternatives began using the YSRI in early 2010. Results will be reported at the September meeting of the Lancaster County Juvenile Justice Review Committee.

Conclusion and Future Efforts

Nationwide juvenile detention alternatives are drawing considerable attention for their role in reducing the detention population of juveniles, reducing recidivism, reducing costs and achieving better outcomes (Medel 2009). Lancaster County could realize many of these same milestones and reach a higher level of effectiveness and efficiency with the implementation of a few key strategies. These include:

1. Lancaster County must begin tracking critical data elements related to the use of Detention Alternatives.
2. Better communication and collaboration within the Lancaster County Juvenile Justice System will result in better outcomes for youth in the system.
3. Data must shape and improve the programmatic changes and implementation of evidence based models.
4. Lancaster County should determine whether recidivism will be used as a long-term evaluation mechanism, and if so, a common definition must be agreed upon and access allowed to data to track recidivism.

The data that was provided for purposes of this evaluation reveal that it is impossible to determine whether Lancaster County Detention Alternatives spared detention costs. Lancaster County must begin to track critical data fields in a centralized data system. For example, for the 474 juvenile court offenders placed in detention in 2009, the following questions cannot be answered by the data:

1. What proportion were pre-adjudicated or post- adjudicated;
2. What the youths' overall risk of re-offense was at the time of referral;

3. Whether the program-specific intervention matched the needs of the youth referred;
4. Whether the offending behavior merited the use of detention;
5. Whether a graduated response exists for youth who violate conditions of the home detention (fail UAs, poor school behavior, etc).

Although there are numerous ways to accomplish a shared system, Lancaster County should consider linking to a system already in place and one that can be accessed by multiple agencies within the juvenile justice system. Detention alternatives can be cost effective mechanisms for diverting youth out of detention, however, if the referral process and data collection are inadequate, a jurisdiction can actually see increasing costs (Mendel, 2009). The reason for this is that jurisdictions fund alternatives to act in lieu of—not in addition to—detention. If youth are referred to both detention and the community alternatives, the overall cost of juvenile services rises in that jurisdiction. Lancaster County’s current documentation systems do not allow observers to determine whether costs are duplicated by using both detention and the alternative.

If youth are served by the detention alternative in lieu of detention – the jurisdiction realizes a cost savings. Data resulted from the evaluation studies of model detention alternative programs in Multnomah County, Oregon, Santa Cruz County, California, Bernalillo County, New Mexico, and Cook County, Illinois demonstrated significant cost savings. Bernalillo County, New Mexico experienced a fifty- eight percent reduction in the average detention population between 1999 and 2004 while Santa Cruz County, California witnessed a sixty-five percent decrease in the average daily population of juvenile halls between 1997 and 2005. Using its current data system, Lancaster County is unable to determine whether a youth has been

in detention prior to being referred to the alternative. Nor can an estimate be done on the number of days “saved” at the time of release. Another aspect that may influence cost is the number of programs a youth does at one time. In addition to data collected on the number of detention days saved, Lancaster County should implement a centralized or web-based system that permits each program to enter and share data relating to the youth’s progress in the alternative.

Working collaboratively requires more than a shared data system. Effective detention alternatives around the country have repeatedly demonstrated that alternatives really only work when there is strong collaboration and leadership. “The cumulative effects of uncoordinated agency actions often have dire consequences: youngsters are detained inappropriately, detention facilities become crowded, [and] resources are wasted . . .“ (Feely 1999, pg 11). Many of the comments collected in the community perspectives section reveal underlying concerns about collaboration. The issue of diversion fees provides a useful example of this point. Many comments indicated that diversion fees should be reduced or waived. Data from diversion indicates that roughly \$28,000 worth of diversion fees were reduced or waived in calendar year 2009: \$14,500 (145 youth at \$100 per case) in fees were waived outright, while another \$14,985 written off as non-payment (after the youth completed the requirements.) This represents a 38% increase from the fees waived in 2008. A collaborative approach would favor a discussion about the number of youth who refused diversion due to the fee and potential solutions to ensure that no youth ends up deeper entrenched in the juvenile justice system for economic reasons.

Data like the data described above is required to make decisions and changes within a system. While some of the programmatic data is available and can start to inform decisions; much of it is not. For instance, as reported above, Project HIRE has a relatively low success rate for keeping youth enrolled in the program. Adopting a curriculum that focuses on specific

vocational talents, like construction, information technology or culinary skills may be very effective. If the relatively low success rate is due to particularly hardened youth being referred to the program, curriculum changes will have minimal impact on outcomes. Each of Lancaster County's Detention Alternatives reported having almost no information about the youth prior to the youth showing up in the program. Agencies must also be given information about the juvenile's criminal history, family environment, and time spent in detention or other institutions if they are to work effectively with youth. In short, programs must know who they are serving, just as Lancaster County must know why youth are referred to a particular program.

Lancaster County must also track whether they are utilizing detention alternatives pre-detention or post-detention. Three of the program coordinators interviewed indicated that they were working with a tougher group of youth, compared to a few years ago when they were "seeing youth who had just started to get into trouble." It may be that they are now getting exactly the youth that should be in detention alternatives, but data must be collected to know this. In addition, it may help to explain why some programs are seeing lower success rates than in past years. Many program coordinators concurred that "the kids are tougher and the success rates are lower." One of the policy questions that should be taken up by Lancaster County is whether more youth should be eligible for the alternatives/ community release, and if so, what obstacles exist to accomplishing their release to the community.

Another critical element of detention alternatives is re-offense data. Clearly no jurisdiction wants to reduce their detention facility population if it means putting their communities at risk. This is often one of the unspoken fears behind rising detention center populations. Jurisdictions that have fully incorporated detention alternative initiatives have found that instead of a spike in juvenile offending, they experience a reduction in juvenile crime.

Santa Cruz County, California experienced a forty seven percent drop in the juvenile felony arrests between 1997 and 2004. Similarly, Bernalillo County, New Mexico had a noticeable drop in the number of youth with felony charges from 4,726 in 1999 to 3,892 in 2005. At the same time, both of these counties succeeded in reaching other federally mandated goals—like reducing disproportionate minority confinement (<http://www.aecf.org>). To achieve a higher level of effectiveness and efficiency, Lancaster’s system must begin tracking whether or not youth continue to break the law and have contact with law enforcement. To start, it is crucial that Lancaster County determine one common understanding and definition of recidivism and require that all programs report any recidivism data using that measurement.

Policy changes should be an area of future research. There are clearly youth in the Lancaster County Detention Center that are not easily released to a community-based alternative. Communities that have been particularly effective at growing community alternatives, have promoted laws and policies that assist people leaving prison from being re-incarcerated by helping them successfully reenter society. These same communities have examined the limitations of trying and incarcerating juveniles as adults and made appropriate changes in policy to enhance their systems. Lancaster County should consider effective policy changes and must implement the four strategies mentioned above if they hope to reach this next level of effectiveness.

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