



Data Planning in the Dual Status Youth Initiatives: Initial Suggestions

By Gene Siegel

This is the first in a series of articles focusing on data-related efforts in jurisdictions undertaking Dual Status Youth Initiatives and Probation System Reviews. This first article will focus on initial suggested core data for Dual Status Youth initiatives. It draws from a variety of sources listed at the end of this article.

The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice uses established models of reform, informed by over a decade-long body of work, in the areas of dual status youth (DSY), probation system improvement, and information sharing.

Most recently, work on behalf of dual status youth received a significant boost through the public-private partnership established by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the MacArthur Foundation. This partnership funded a four site technical assistance and consultation effort. The project resulted in the December 2013 release of two seminal publications that consolidated a dozen years of field based experience and lessons learned on behalf of this vulnerable and challenging population. As DSY initiatives continue to develop in jurisdictions across the country with the assistance of these publications, the RFK National Resource Center endeavors to offer additional guidance on critical issues of importance such as the routine identification of dual status youth; data collection, management and outcome measurement; and screening and assessment tools and methods, to include effective identification of trauma and targeted treatment for the same.

Additionally, the RFK National Resource Center's PSR field-based work, which began in 2005 with a comprehensive review of the Los Angeles County, California Probation Department, continues to grow,

The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, led by Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, provides consultation, technical assistance, and training to serve local, state, and national leaders, practitioners and youth-serving agencies to improve system performance and outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system. The RFK National Resource Center focuses primarily on youth with prior or current involvement in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, known as dual status youth, the review and improvement of juvenile probation systems, and the use of a model framework to address the state and national laws and policies governing the exchange and sharing of data, information, and records for youth and families.

For additional information, please visit:

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with jurisdictions around the nation committing to examining the efficiency and effectiveness of juvenile probation policy and practice. These jurisdictions follow a framework articulated in the *Probation Review Guidebook* (2011), authored by Janet K. Wiig and John A. Tuell. A recently released report tracking the three year period following the implementation of recommendations developed from the juvenile probation review in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana can be found in *Probation Review Implementation: How Best Practices Meet Everyday Practices* (2013) authored by John S. Ryals, Jr., Ph.D. The remarkable gains in this jurisdiction include reductions in recidivism, reductions in caseload size, improved assessment of risks and targeted intervention needs, reduction in detention placement and secure commitments, and improved managerial practices and relationships with affiliated youth-serving partners.

As a complement to its site-based work in the above areas, the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice established the Dual Status Youth Practice Network (DSY PN) and the Probation Systems Review Practice Network (PSR PN)¹ to advance effective and innovative juvenile justice reform work originally initiated through the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's *Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice* over a decade ago. Both of these networks are comprised of a dozen of the nation's leaders and practitioners previously or currently involved in state, local or national work to improve outcomes for dual status youth and youth involved with the juvenile probation system. Additionally, the Practice Networks are supported by a devoted group of experts in the areas of policy and legislative reform, data collection and performance measurement, screening and assessment, and educational engagement and reform. Many among this distinguished group have successfully led collaborative reforms in their jurisdictions using the tools, resources and publications developed through the support of the *Models for Change* initiative.

¹ For more information on the background and other details surrounding the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice and the Practice Networks, visit www.rfknrcjj.org.

It is this history of experiences and commitment from the RFK National Resource Center that makes obvious the need for an intensified focus on core data that will improve the long-term capacity of states and local sites to collect, manage, and track outcome measures for both dual status and probation involved youth. This series of articles addresses this need, beginning with the current article, which provides a listing of key data questions and suggested core data elements for dual status youth that are intended to serve as data planning or reference tools for state and local jurisdictions. Although this initial article focuses primarily on the dual status youth population, there will be fundamental instruction useful to sites launching work in PSR as well.

Purpose of this article

As indicated in the *Dual Status Youth-Technical Assistance Workbook*, the term 'dual status youth' refers to "youth who come into contact with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and occupy various statuses in terms of their relationship to the two systems."² Research shows that dual status youth, in comparison to youth without cross-system involvement, present a range of important challenges such as higher recidivism rates, higher detention rates, frequent placement changes, poor permanency outcomes, substantial behavioral health needs, poor educational performance, and substantially higher costs overall than youth without cross-system involvement. Trying to capture relevant data on dual status cases in a more active or dynamic manner so that one has the most current information represents a considerable challenge for jurisdictions that are attempting to improve how they handle these difficult matters. Yet, this is a challenge worth meeting.

The primary intent of this first article is to help jurisdictions undertaking DSY initiatives begin to think about the data work and provide a helpful data construct that will support their efforts at improving outcomes for this population of youth. It is important to

² See pp. 3-4 of the *Dual Status Youth-Technical Assistance Workbook* (2013) for more specific definitional criteria.

emphasize, up front, that jurisdictions undertaking DSY practice reform will likely be at very different stages of data capabilities when they begin their work, with some sites more advanced or sophisticated in their data circumstances than others. Nevertheless, this article should prompt important progress in identifying the range and types of data being collected and tracked, ultimately enhancing a jurisdiction's understanding of its dual status youth and the impact of newly implemented strategies.

Why is having accurate and relevant data so important?

Just asking this seemingly obvious question seems unnecessary, yet it is nothing short of astonishing when one considers how many juvenile courts, juvenile justice organizations, and child welfare agencies continue to struggle with the availability, quality, and usefulness of their data. The answer to the question deserves emphasis because it gets to the heart of why data and improved data-driven capabilities must be top priorities. In short, the answer is, *we simply cannot know that what we do in juvenile justice and child welfare makes a difference in the lives of youths, families, and communities, without good data.*

The common frustrations associated with unmanageable data environments (frustrations that can include difficulties managing automated systems, competing with other agencies for IT or data support in a large agency or multi-agency environment, having limited capacities to make sense of or analyze ones' data, and so forth) can become even more pronounced when an agency or department decides to focus on special subgroups of cases such as dual status youth. System reform efforts can, rather quickly and sometimes dramatically, reveal the limitations associated with existing data, particularly automated data systems.

It can therefore be assumed that having an affordable, reliable, timely, and workable model for getting necessary information – the “*how an agency is going to collect and track data*” component - should be a priority (albeit often challenging) goal.³ For now and in this

³ This important topic will be addressed in a future article.

first article, however, the primary focus will be on the types of data – the “*what jurisdictions should consider collecting and tracking*” component - that seem most essential for those implementing dual status youth reforms.

A brief overview of some key past efforts to track dual status youth data including prevalence and outcome data

Where data have been collected on dual status youth, it has largely been done so as single point in time snapshots. This type of measure can provide useful summary information about the impacts of DSY reform for selected time periods. However, as the momentum of the DSY initiative moves forward, DSY sites and other jurisdictions looking to improve their data capabilities will need to find ways to collect, track and produce meaningful data *in a more active or dynamic manner than perhaps they have previously done.*

As DSY sites (and other jurisdictions) move forward with enhanced or expanded reform efforts, there will need to be consideration of more active data approaches that can provide more timely details on dual status cases on an ongoing basis (e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly), recognizing that in at least some of sites, this process will take some time to realize.

Some brief comments about developing automated data systems and data analysis capacities

While this article will not delve into extensive details of how to best construct or manage an automated data system for tracking dual status cases (a topic to be addressed in a forthcoming article), it is important to emphasize that very few jurisdictions have integrated or shared automated information systems between child welfare and juvenile justice.⁴ Furthermore, even those jurisdictions

⁴ The National Center for Juvenile Justice is in the process of completing a nationwide scan, with support from *Models for Change*, that will identify, at least in a preliminary fashion, which states (and perhaps, smaller jurisdictions within those states) report having at least some levels of

with more centralized automated circumstances may not be able to promptly identify dual status cases and/or may not have the data analysis resources to examine their data in great detail.⁵

As jurisdictions seek to strengthen their data collection efforts, *it is recommended that automated data systems designed to track dual status cases track the progress of individual youth.* A well designed and planned automated dual status youth data system (whether it be part of a larger automated system or a standalone system), with essential data analyst support, should be able to take the desired data for selected individual cases, even if that data comes from separate systems housed at juvenile justice and child welfare agencies, and summarize that data in relevant performance and statistical reports.⁶

Balancing the benefits of being able to maintain more accurate and timely data while managing the workload demands of caseworkers and probation staffers (who happen to be key sources of data) represents another important challenge. Ideally, a well-designed automated dual status youth data (or case management) system would produce a range of relevant case management functions and performance reports that would help caseworkers and probation officers do their jobs and show them how their cases are or are not progressing.

Other important challenges

By definition, dual status cases are involved (or have histories of involvement) in both the

integrated juvenile justice and child welfare automated information capabilities. Results from the scan will be featured at www.jjgps.org.

⁵ It is much more common for separate child welfare and juvenile justice agencies to operate their own automated case management or data systems. Moreover, many jurisdictions often do not dedicate sufficient resources or underestimate the need for internal or external data analysis capabilities. Ideally, each jurisdiction undertaking DSY reform would have access to a data analyst who has sufficient information technology expertise to work with the local automated database *and* has a working knowledge of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

⁶ It is assumed that the four DSY sites will address cross-system confidentiality and privacy issues and that applicable data/information sharing agreements will be in place.

delinquency and child welfare systems. These two entities almost always have different approaches (including those influenced by different goals associated with their agency missions, laws/statutes, etc.) and/or internal capabilities for tracking data associated with dual status youth. So, even though this article proposes a listing of what may be considered basic or suggested data for child welfare and juvenile justice, one cannot ignore the impacts of these factors, nor the internal data capabilities (including automated resources and staff time) of cross-system partners that ultimately will drive the range and types of data to be tracked.

What information do you want to know?

When approaching DSY reform, communities will engage in planning processes to not only prioritize the types of changes they hope to make in handling dual status cases but also to more clearly define the types of data, performance indicators, and outcomes they hope to track.

Improving one's data circumstances is largely a dynamic learning process, not something that should be done "off the top of one's head." It requires dedicated planning time and committed leadership. The initial focus will be on clarifying what a site wants to know about its dual status target population and on clarifying the data needed to answer associated questions. To later achieve truly advanced progress, it will also require an adequate level of dedicated resources that should include data analysis capabilities that, ideally, are provided by someone who has "lived" or at least has sufficient knowledge of both the juvenile justice and child welfare realms; that is, someone who is able to translate the complexities associated with dual status data into meaningful and useful information. In the longer term, resources may also be dedicated to developing new or enhanced automated databases and/or case management systems to keep track of these cases.

To support initial data planning efforts, a three-tiered format is offered and displayed in the following graphic:

Suggested Data Planning Model

Identify general data categories to help guide data planning.

Create an initial listing of data-related questions that begin to clarify what you want to know; then,

Create an initial listing of possible data elements that are likely to address those questions.

To reaffirm, these suggestions should not be considered exhaustive nor should they be allowed to exclude additional local data identified by sites themselves. As indicated in the *Dual Status Youth Technical Assistance Workbook*, each jurisdiction will be initiating at least some important steps in identifying the types of data they wish to track, data that should be clearly and operationally defined, in ways that are agreed upon, measurable, and/or observable.

Tier One: Identify general categories to help data planning⁷

To further aid sites with their data planning stages, this article organizes suggested data questions and data elements into eight general categories. These categories include:

1. Dual status youth prevalence (i.e., how many cases are there?);
2. Case characteristics and history (i.e., what do the cases look like?);
3. Case processing (i.e., how have/do cases move through the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, including key decisions?);

⁷ It is assumed that sites will address cross-system confidentiality and privacy issues and that applicable data/information sharing agreements will be in place.

4. Case management, planning, and supervision (i.e., how are cases handled by key stakeholders including the court, social workers, and probation officers?);
5. Protocol adherence and training (i.e., are local protocols being followed, is cross-system training evident?);⁸
6. Placement and services (i.e., where are youth being placed, what services are being provided, how often, and what costs are incurred?);
7. System outcomes and performance indicators (i.e., what impacts are reforms having on the child welfare and juvenile justice systems?);⁹ and,
8. Youth and family outcomes (i.e., what are the impacts of local interventions and reforms on dual status youth including those tied to age, gender, and race/ethnicity?).

While there is some obvious overlap among the eight categories, they offer an understandable conceptual framework that

⁸ This article assumes that sites will either have dual status youth protocols or will be developing and implementing during the early stages of the initiative.

⁹ See pp. 4 and 5 of the *Dual Status Youth Technical Assistance Workbook* (2013) for a bulleted summary of desired outcomes.

should further help site planning efforts to identify, organize and prioritize local data.

Tiers Two and Three: Identify data-related questions and the data elements needed to answer those questions

As illustrated, the second tier of the planning model calls for general data-related questions that seem particularly relevant to the dual status target population(s), while the third tier seeks more specific examples or types of data (data elements) that may help answer those questions.¹⁰ Examples are provided for both in the following sections.

Note that the examples of suggested data elements delineate between those that may be considered “basic” or essential and those that may be explored if local capacity allows and there is particular interest for additional data.

The initial listing should be viewed as *aspirational* – *something to strive for* – as well as a reference tool, to help sites identify and prioritize the data elements they may choose to track for dual status cases (and any comparison group, as applicable) in what will likely be a more active and dynamic manner than they have in the past.

Once more, the designations of “basic” and “additional” (or supplemental) data elements should be considered preliminary. Their inclusion as planning reference points also acknowledge important differences across sites in terms of data access, availability, and reliability. That said, the intention is that the planning framework, suggested data questions and data elements will make it easier to begin to examine, define, operationalize, and prioritize the data that jurisdictions will be able track as they

¹⁰ Another way to think of the data element content is to view it as something akin to a data collection form that allows you to compile a running (or static) record of core data elements that can help, through database software, produce the types of data/information sought. It is important to note, however, that this article does not cover the level of detail actually needed to more fully define the data elements. Each site will have to take the time, through a fairly deliberative process, to more clearly and operationally define each data element.

embark on or expand upon their local data improvement initiatives.¹¹

Data planning tables

The following tables reflect the three-tiered planning approach including the eight general data categories, as well as the initial listings of suggested data questions and data elements. For some of the data elements, it is assumed that a site will be able to obtain individual youth level data, which may be a real challenge in some jurisdictions.¹²

There are two things to keep in mind as readers review the tables. First, the term “history” generally refers to a chronologic record for the specified data element and includes both past and current information (this may include specific start and end dates for each change or key event). Additionally, note that some of these data elements are static and will not change or be updated, while others are dynamic and will change over time and thus will require applicable start and end dates.

Again, the suggested basic and additional data elements are organized within each of the eight data categories and the listings are intended to help guide local planning without being overly prescriptive. Ultimately, it will fall upon the sites to more thoroughly define and select their data elements in ways that are feasible at the local level and that make sense to them.

¹¹ To reflect local processes and terminology, DSY sites will have to take sufficient time to define and/or refine the specific data elements that they choose to collect and track. Eventually, each site should consider constructing their own “data dictionary” that will spell out local definitions and help reinforce data consistency and quality over time. For one example of a dependency data dictionary see pp. 4-16 in *Dependency Case Tracking System Data Elements*, authored by Greg Halemba.

¹² If a site is not able to track individual cases/youth, then it is assumed that the site will, at a minimum, periodically collect and compile summary data on its target population. This snapshot data approach, however, will severely limit active/dynamic use of the data to monitor program activities and performance. That said, sites can still draw from the initial listing of data questions and data elements to construct the types of summary data they may initially collect and compile.

Data category 1: Dual status youth prevalence		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
How many dual status youth are there in the target population?	Child welfare and juvenile justice unique case numbers/identifiers. In some jurisdictions, will also require youth's name and DOB for cross matching.	History of prior contacts with child welfare and juvenile justice.

Data category 2: Case characteristics and history		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
Demographic data: what does the target population look like? Where are dual status youth coming from? At what ages are youth becoming dually involved? What is the history of abuse/neglect allegations and findings for these youth? Who are the referral sources for the target population? Which system did the youth enter first?	DOB, race/ethnicity, gender. Type of residence (dynamic variable, can change over time). Youth residence address/zip at point of referral that led to project involvement. Delinquency arrest/referral history including referral sources and most serious charges. ¹³ Dependency and delinquency petition history. Child welfare, juvenile justice and mental health/substance abuse assessment and screening data (e.g., type, risk/needs, etc.).	Status offense referral history. ¹⁴ History of youth receiving voluntary/prevention (child welfare/dependency) services but not court involved. Juvenile justice system history including diversion, probation, and other juvenile justice statuses/levels of involvement.

¹³ There appears to be growing interest in the source of delinquency complaints/referrals for dual status youth. For example, there is a sense that a substantial number of complaints/referrals are initiated as a result of incidents that occur in congregate care facilities (e.g., group homes). Because dual status youth tend to change placements frequently, it seems important to track both placement histories and the sources of delinquency referrals.

¹⁴ In some jurisdictions, status offense complaints/violations may be handled by child welfare.

Data category 3: Case processing		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
<p>How can your jurisdiction best track progress for each youth in the target population?</p> <p>How long do key case processing stages take for the target population?</p> <p>What are the court histories of the target population?</p> <p>How many judges and attorneys have been involved in these cases?</p> <p>If youth was detained, and time spent in detention?</p> <p>When are dual status youth being admitted into the DSY project?</p>	<p>Judicial history including names of jurists handling each hearing or number of different judges handling hearings.</p> <p>Legal status changes (including those tied to dual status).¹⁵</p> <p>Date of admission into dual status project.</p>	<p>Court hearing history including all hearings by type, date, findings, and hearing results – this may include informal proceedings as applicable.</p> <p>Attorney history including name(s) of attorney(s) at each hearing (including prosecutors, defense attorneys, dependency attorneys, et. al.).</p>

Data category 4: Case management, planning and supervision		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
<p>How many social workers and probation officers have been assigned to handle these cases?</p> <p>How many joint case assessments and joint case plans have been conducted, who attends, and when?</p> <p>What are the current permanency statuses of the target population?</p> <p>What are the current probation statuses of the target population?</p>	<p>Assigned child welfare case manager/social worker history.</p> <p>Joint assessments and/or plans conducted.</p> <p>Assigned probation officer history.</p> <p>Most recent permanent plan status.</p> <p>Most recent probation supervision status.</p>	<p>Changes in child welfare and/or probation supervision (i.e., levels, types of supervision, etc.).</p> <p>Listing of who attends joint case planning events.</p>

¹⁵ Different jurisdictions will vary in the ways that they confirm or determine a youth's dual status, and these statuses may shift during the life of a case.

Data category 5: Protocol adherence and training¹⁶		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
<p>How aware are social workers and probation officers of dual status protocols?</p> <p>How often are social workers and probation officers adhering to protocols?</p> <p>How many social workers and probation officers are attending cross-system training (as applicable)?</p>	<p>Aware of protocols? Yes/No</p> <p>Protocols followed? Yes/No</p> <p>If applicable, cross system training attended? Yes/No</p>	<p>How aware are social workers and probation officers of the effects of trauma in the lives and behaviors of dual status youth?</p> <p>How trauma-informed are the protocols related to dual status youth?</p>

Data category 6: Placement and services		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
<p>What types of services did the target population receive before and after DSY program entry and when are these services being provided?</p> <p>What are the placement histories of the target population?</p>	<p>Listing of all services/treatment provided including some indication of whether services were completed or not.</p> <p>Living situation/placement statuses including all placement names and categories/types of placements.</p>	<p>Primary caregiver(s).</p> <p>Reason for placement changes.</p>

¹⁶ Tracking these system performance indicators (awareness and adherence to protocols) will probably require either periodic surveys of assigned staff and/or periodic case reviews conducted by supervisors. For a good example, see the *King County (WA) Uniting for Youth Implementation Evaluation* report.

Table 7 incorporates the listing of “universal system and youth outcomes presented for initial consideration” in the *Dual Status Youth Technical Assistance Workbook* (2013, pp. 4-5) and supplemented those with other possible outcome and performance indicators that may be of interest.

Data category 7: System outcomes and performance indicators		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
<p>Has local data collection and information sharing improved?</p> <p>Are multi-disciplinary teams and cross-system assessment methodologies active, improved, and more common?</p> <p>Has access to and protocols for consistent use of targeted evidence-based services improved?</p> <p>Have court processes improved/become more coordinated?</p> <p>Is there evidence of more efficient use of limited resources?</p> <p>Have there been reductions in costly and ineffective placements and incarceration?</p> <p>Is there improved local capacity to analyze and track outcomes and trends?</p> <p>Has engagement of families in decision-making improved?</p> <p>Is there evidence of reduced racial and ethnic disparities?</p>	<p>Information sharing agreements in place.</p> <p>Dates of MDT meetings including who attends.</p> <p>Appropriate designation of evidence-based services in the database/data collection form.</p> <p>Dates of consolidated hearings, names of judges conducting hearings, codes for hearing outcomes (e.g., held/completed, continued, etc.).</p> <p>Conservative cost estimates for different types of placements and incarceration.</p> <p>Listings of who attends MDTs or equivalent including codes for family members.</p> <p>Appropriate codes to track race/ethnicity data.</p>	<p>Enhanced automated case tracking and data capabilities including data analysis.</p> <p>Service expenditure data that shows sharing of resources.</p> <p>Evidence of workload impact including greater efficiency (e.g. probation officers and social workers handling cases).</p>

Data category 8: Youth & family outcomes (including outcomes by age, gender, and race/ethnicity as applicable)¹⁷		
<i>Data questions</i>	<i>Basic/Essential data elements</i>	<i>Additional/Supplemental data</i>
<p>What types of dependency and delinquency case outcomes/results are these youth experiencing during project involvement, at case closure, and after program exit?</p> <p>How many dual status youth are experiencing repeated maltreatment?</p> <p>Has dual status youth recidivism declined?</p> <p>Are dual status youth experiencing reduced detention episodes and, when detained, shorter lengths of stay?</p> <p>Is there evidence of improved educational performance among the target population?</p> <p>Is there evidence of improved involvement in pro-social activities?</p> <p>Is there evidence of improved behavioral health functioning?</p> <p>Is there evidence of increased stability in home or placement?</p> <p>Is there evidence of improved family functioning?</p> <p>Are dual status youth being “connected” to supportive and caring adults?</p> <p>Is there evidence of increased social competencies?</p>	<p>Case closure results.</p> <p>Subsequent abuse/neglect allegations after program entry.</p> <p>Subsequent arrests, referrals, petitions, and adjudications (during and after program exit, including six month, 12 month and two year recidivism checks).¹⁸</p> <p>Subsequent dispositions or sentences.</p> <p>Detention episodes in excess of 24 hours and lengths of stay in detention.</p> <p>Changes in residential status.</p>	<p>Available school performance data including enrollment, attendance, grades, absences, suspensions/expulsions, graduation, etc.</p> <p>Indicators of pro-social engagement (this may have to be self-report data or may be drawn from applicable program status and program exit assessment tools).</p> <p>Subsequent mental health status assessment data.</p> <p>Indicators of improved family functioning and connection to supportive adults during program involvement, at program exit, and post-program.</p> <p>Employment data.</p>

¹⁷ Each jurisdiction will be crafting its own desired outcomes for the target population. Some of the questions listed here may be of increased importance in jurisdictions that have prioritized outcomes such as improved educational performance, involvement in pro-social activities, and the like, thus making related data elements essential rather than supplemental.

¹⁸ It is recommended that sites consider tracking multiple agreed-upon recidivism measures, if feasible, including any that may involve prosecution in adult criminal court.

Once sites have identified and refined the data they will collect (including how often), they will be ready to explore how to best track the data. Eventually, DSY partners should be able to generate automated report listings that could be used to actively monitor individual case progress along with a range of aggregate statistical reports that would summarize relevant case characteristics, case activity, performance and outcome data.

It is important to remember that the above listing is not mandatory nor should it be considered exhaustive. It is intended to be an initial guide to help prompt local data planning work. *Each site needs to gauge what it can and cannot reasonably do on the data front.* In addition, when looking at specific data elements, it may not be feasible (in terms of data availability and/or time and workload demands) for some sites to record or track the level of detail called for in some of the suggested items (e.g., detailed placement histories for each youth). As an alternative in the short term, it may be better for these sites to keep aggregate counts of such things as placement changes, for example.

In sum, jurisdictions exploring dual status youth practice reforms should view these suggested data questions and data elements as initial pointers that can help prompt more detailed discussions of the types of data that each site will choose to collect and track. In addition, these tables can be used to clarify agreed-upon operational definitions that are essential to ensuring data consistency, quality, and usefulness.

Concluding remarks

This article presents a basic conceptual framework, using a three-tier planning approach, that should help sites begin to think about their plans for improving local data capacities. The planning approach emphasized the need to begin by formulating questions (i.e., what do you want to know?) about local DSY, and then provided examples of possible data elements that could answer those

questions. However, each site will have to construct its own list of questions and will have to determine the range and types of local data available to answer those questions. The listings in this article are mere examples that can be used in conjunction with the planning steps outlined in the *Dual Status Youth – Technical Assistance Workbook* to help clarify and expand local data-related efforts.

The article emphasizes that all data to be tracked should be clearly and operationally defined, in ways that are agreed upon, measurable, and/or observable. It also emphasizes that DSY sites should strive to achieve and maintain the most up-to-date data on individual youth, and that the individual should be the basic unit of count as local automated data systems are developed to track dual status cases. This may prove challenging for a number of reasons including the simple fact that data capabilities across sites may vary widely, perhaps requiring some sites to, at least initially, continue with less timely snapshot data collection routines (some of which may not be automated).

Regardless, if one of the important goals of a DSY initiative is to create, enhance, and sustain active and dynamic data capabilities (recognizing that different jurisdictions will be at different stages at the onset of their reform efforts), then jurisdictions should begin thinking, from the start, of ways to acquire and/or allocate sufficient resources for appropriate automated system development and qualified data analysis support.

One additional point deserves special mention here. Jurisdictions should consider the importance of collecting, compiling, and producing data that are useful to those who need it most – the social workers and probation officers, and other key decision makers, who work directly with dual status youth. DSY sites (and other jurisdictions) should be very mindful of this aspect as they engage in data-related planning. Ultimately, most of the data needed to answer key questions will come from those who work directly with these cases. These

data sources must see the value in providing data. As part of their data planning efforts, sites should consider innovative ways to provide information about these cases to key data sources, in ways that are helpful, informative, and useful. This may include periodic caseload status and performance reports, and other indicators that help practitioners do their jobs and that reinforce how important their work happens to be.

As noted, developing enhanced data capabilities is a learning process that takes time, commitment, and sufficient resources to succeed. By making the commitment to this process, the new sites should be able to achieve more active and timely data collection and case tracking, and should be able to enhance the quality and range of their data to reflect the impacts of dual status system reforms on important measures of performance and outcomes.

Subsequent articles in the data series will delve more deeply into topics deemed most relevant to jurisdictions undertaking reform and will highlight developments in jurisdictions involved in initiatives in partnership with the RFK National Resource Center. This may perhaps include periodic updates on the data circumstances in each site, the types of data being collected/tracked and how these are being tracked, how data are being “used” to guide policy and practice decisions, and how data can help inform key decision-makers and others about the importance and value of dual status youth and probation services reforms.

If you have any questions about the content of this article please contact Gene Siegel, Project Consultant for the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, at genesiegel@mac.com

Sources

Many of the sources for this article can be found on the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s website at <http://modelsforchange.net/publications>

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