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**KEYS TO YOUTH JUSTICE IMPROVEMENT:
Demonstration of Practical, Sustainable,
Measurable, and Replicable Solutions**

By John A. Tuell, with Michelle Darling and Jodi Martin



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**RFK NATIONAL
RESOURCE CENTER
FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE**

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**RFK NATIONAL
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DISCLAIMER:

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INTRODUCTION

The **Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice** (RFK National Resource Center), launched in 2013, provides training, technical assistance and consultation to local, state, and national leaders, practitioners, and youth-serving agencies. In partnership with communities and jurisdictions across the nation, we guide and inform youth justice improvement that systematically and routinely produces better outcomes for children and families. Our commitment to adolescent development science, best-practice methods and approaches, and evidence-based treatment and services provides the foundation for achievement of our goals and objectives for youth, families, and the communities in which they reside.

During the most recent year for which national data are available,¹ juvenile probation and parole oversaw community supervision of just over 320,000 youth, including diversion responses, informal adjustment, and deferred adjudication cases. Nearly two-thirds of the 320,000 youth experienced a formal probation status as a dispositional alternative.² It is well documented that youth enter the juvenile justice system with high rates of trauma exposure and active trauma symptoms, with research reflecting that more than 80% of youth in juvenile justice settings are exposed to more than one traumatic experience. Those events can exacerbate the rates of substance misuse, and mental and physical health challenges, and reduce responsiveness to treatment for youth with whom juvenile probation practitioners work,³ thereby reducing the likelihood of completion of court ordered periods of supervision and/or successful reintegration into the community.

Probation departments, courts, and community supervision organizations, like a number of other agencies, function within a framework of statutes, policies, and practices compiled over the course of many years. Typically, there is little time or effort spent reflecting on that framework to determine how well it is working and whether it functions in a manner that is optimal and comports with the current research and best practices. Juvenile probation and courts frequently take a narrow view of their accountability for individual or cumulative outcomes for youth entering the system. Juvenile probation and youth

justice stakeholders too often only value level of effort—number of cases filed, how fast those cases are disposed of, and what type of offenses were involved. Further, in the face of advancing neuroscience on adolescent development and research-driven evidence of practices that yield reductions in recidivism and affiliated positive behavioral health outcomes for youth, culture and practice ignoring the fundamental tenets of adolescent behavior change diminishes optimal achievement of outcomes within probation and youth justice systems. Primary shared stakeholder outcomes include measurable impact on public safety, prevention of reoffending, accountability, and fairness and equity for all youth and families.⁴

The RFK National Resource Center was competitively selected to receive a grant awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) through the **OJJDP FY 18 Second Chance Act Ensuring Public Safety and Improving Outcomes for Youth in Confinement and While Under Community Supervision** program (Award #2018-CZ-BX-K002). We identified our ultimate goal of the grant-awarded project as “improving outcomes of youth placed on community supervision, particularly those with co-occurring disorders,

in the interest of reducing delinquent behavior and promoting public safety.” To accomplish this, the RFK National Resource Center proposed to

conduct a field-based project guided by our proven framework for community supervision (probation) and juvenile justice system reform pioneered in 2006 in Los Angeles County, California by John A. Tuell, Executive Director and founder of the RFK National Resource Center and Janet K. Wieg, J.D., original consultation partner. An extraordinary team of expert juvenile justice staff and consultants supports our work. The guidance for the activities in the project derives primarily from the **Probation System Review Guidebook, 3rd Edition** (2019)⁵ and **Developmental Reform in Juvenile Justice: Translating the Science of Adolescent Development to Sustainable Best Practice** (2017).⁶ The approach, successfully conducted in more than forty state and local jurisdictions across the United States, prioritizes the commitment to intensive field-based technical assistance in collaboration with youth justice leaders



i The RFK National Resource Center's library of publications and tools is available at: www.rfkncjj.org/resources

and practitioners to ensure diversity of ideas that inform the system improvements and innovative reforms. The framework for review, examination, and analysis detailed in the Probation System Review Guidebook, 3rd Edition focuses on the following four elements:

Element A: Administration

Element B: Probation Supervision

Element C: Intra- and Interagency Work Processes

Element D: Quality Assurance

The approach includes an interview protocol to ensure full coverage of all relevant topics within each core element and the ongoing involvement of local subject matter experts (SMEs) to inform and advise all phases of the system review. The latter commitment to SME engagement ensures that improvements and innovations consider the unique environmental and contextual factors supporting or obstructing change in each jurisdiction. Using this well-established framework for action, the RFK National Resource Center launched the **Dennis M. Mondoro Probation and Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Project**ⁱⁱ (hereafter referenced as the Mondoro Project) to collaborate with six competitively selected local jurisdictions to achieve the following core objectives that were consistent with the expressed purposes of the grant solicitation:

- ❖ create or enhance a comprehensive youth justice system improvement plan in each selected jurisdiction;
- ❖ identify opportunities in each jurisdiction for improved community supervision performance based on best practice standards that address the needs of both youth with and without trauma and behavioral health diagnoses; and
- ❖ implement the improvement plans in each jurisdiction with the endorsement of local leadership, thus ensuring sustainable and measurable practice enhancement.

Our historical experience reveals that jurisdictions realize these goals and objectives when undertaking a comprehensive and systematic review and analysis of all key decision points and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and decision-makers. The latter point calls for the formation of a Probation System Review Team (PSRT). This team of multidisciplinary

ii The grant project (award: OJJDP FY 2018 Second Chance Act Ensuring Public Safety and Improving Outcomes for Youth in Confinement and While under Community Supervision; # 2018-CZ-BX-K002) was named after Dennis M. Mondoro. RFK National Resource Center's Executive Director, John A. Tuell, had the esteemed honor of working with Dennis at both the Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Dennis was deeply committed to the improvement of the juvenile justice system on behalf of every youth and their family, and unfortunately passed away far too soon to realize his professional and personal dreams. The RFK National Resource Center requested the naming of the project for our friend and colleague to ensure his passion for justice system improvement and all youth endured throughout and beyond this grant project.

collaborators, involving probation personnel, judicial officers, prosecutors and public defenders, court administrative leadership, and an array of community service partners is integral to the successful administration and completion of the review and development of a community supervision (probation) and juvenile justice system improvement plan. This factor stands at the top of those criteria that position jurisdictions for success. In fact, jurisdictions previously committed to this method to lead the complex, multidisciplinary change process and develop comprehensive plans for prioritized practice and policy change significantly increased the likelihood of sustainable and replicable improvements to system performance within community supervision and probation practices.

Further, collaborative change undertaken within the Mondoro Project to improve youth justice systems benefitted from assignment of personnel to provide oversight, coordination, and logistical support for the array of activities (e.g., meetings, information exchange, electronic messaging, video conferences) that comprise the work. This commitment may include a special assignment from an existing position or creation of a new position where possible. This intentional focus on a discrete set of organizing and coordinating responsibilities has been a key to success in multiple jurisdictions undertaking probation and juvenile justice system reform. One such example is provided in Lancaster County, Nebraska in which the state Administrative Office of Courts and Probation (AOCP) allocated a full-time staff person to organize all Probation and Juvenile Justice Review activities within Lancaster County and ensured a strong partnership with the AOCP. This local-state coordination and partnership increased the likelihood of successful navigation of challenges that often thwart local system change related to statutes, policies, and funding. The Program Coordinator job description in Lancaster County, Nebraska provides an excellent example of the key activities that significantly contributed to their successful reforms (*see Appendix A*).

AT A GLANCE

Designating a Project Coordinator

A probation department could designate one of its own employees with solid organizational, management, and analytical skills to develop and manage a work plan for the review. Whoever performs these functions, it is critical that the person be given the time and authority to keep the work plan and participants moving forward.⁷

An additional foundational premise of the Mondoro Project relied upon an agreed set of primary responsibilities or aims of the youth justice system within each jurisdiction. The RFK National Resource Center focuses on a triad of interwoven aims that include holding youth accountable for wrongdoing, prevention of further offending, and treatment of all youth with fairness and equality. Within that framework, the research strongly supports that focusing on the positive social development of youth can enhance and assure the protection of public safety. A brief examination of these responsibilities reflects their compatibility with the developmental approach to juvenile justice applied in this project.

Accountability – It is imperative that our youth justice systems provide an opportunity for youth to accept responsibility for their actions and make amends to individual victims and the community. This focus ensures that offenders are answerable for wrongdoing, particularly in cases in which there is harm to person and/or property. These methods do not mimic the adult criminal justice system (e.g., “lengthy confinement, control and condemnation”). While monitoring and supervision are among the tools of response, to be effective in protecting public safety it must be accompanied by opportunities for youth to address their accountability through the research-supported best practices (e.g., cognitive skill building, positive social connections, balance of incentives and sanctions).

Preventing Reoffending – The best-practice approach to reduce reoffending includes the commitment to the use of structured decision-making instruments that informs professional judgement at key decision points (e.g., risk-needs-responsivity [RNR] tools). These scientifically validated tools and instruments can identify whether a youth is at low, moderate, or high risk to reoffend. At the referral and intake processing decision point, this may provide a critical opportunity to divert the youth from formal involvement in the youth justice system. The systematic use of these risk-screening tools provides a positive opportunity to prevent reoffending through diversion or alternative responses to formal involvement in the youth justice system. Further, RNR assessment tools (e.g., SAVRY, YASI, YLS-CMI) may be used to assess for the specific needs of the youth in identified domains (family, peers, behavioral health, education, etc.) and permit a more effective matching of treatment and programmatic interventions that will ameliorate the risk to reoffend and produce positive behavior change for each youth.

Fairness and Equal Treatment – Youth-serving systems are responsible for treating youth through the assurance that due process laws and procedures are protected for every youth and family involved in the court process. The fairness standard applies to the practice of swift justice. Practically speaking,

if the youth justice process is not timely, many youth will experience prolonged uncertainty that can negatively affect trust and a sense of fairness. Ensuring that youth perceive they have been treated fairly and with dignity contributes to several important features of prosocial development, including moral development, belief in the legitimacy of the law, and the legal socialization process generally. At the core of this issue is the research and data that reflect the disproportionate numbers of youth of color involved in the youth justice system, particularly in the deeper end of system involvement (e.g., detention, correctional placements). When quantitative and qualitative data indicate disproportionality, each youth justice system must be dedicated to examining this circumstance and must develop consistent policies and practices that seek to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

AT A GLANCE Elements for Success

- ✦ Probation System Review Team
- ✦ Access to System Stakeholders
- ✦ Designated Coordinator
- ✦ Unifying Vision
- ✦ Defined Mission Statement

COMMITMENT TO CORE PRINCIPLES / HALLMARKS OF AN EFFECTIVE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

To accomplish the three compatible responsibilities of the youth justice system, the RFK National Resource Center committed to the practices serving a research-informed, adolescent development approach to enhancement, innovation, and improvement. In response to *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*,⁸ a subcommitteeⁱⁱⁱ was formed in 2014 to create a prioritized plan for implementation of the developmental approach that informed the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The subcommittee members were contributing authors for the *Implementing Juvenile Justice Reform: The Federal Role* report⁹ identifying seven hallmarks comprising a juvenile justice system committed to optimizing system performance and positive youth outcomes. These seven hallmarks include:

iii The subcommittee was formed within the Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education of the National Academy of Sciences and included the Executive Director of the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice.

- Accountability without criminalization
- Alternatives to justice system involvement
- Individualized response based on assessment of needs and risks
- Confinement only when necessary for public safety
- A genuine commitment to fairness
- Sensitivity to disparate treatment
- Family engagement

For the sites participating in the Mondoro Project, these hallmarks helped to organize the opportunities to achieve the key aims and responsibilities of the juvenile justice system around research-supported methods of practice at each key decision point in a youth's case. Additionally, the Mondoro Project operated on the premise that when the key hallmarks and core principles are interwoven throughout all decision points and among all of the relevant practitioners in policy and practice, a state and/or local jurisdiction may have in place a successful, replicable, and sustainable framework for positive juvenile justice system performance and youth outcomes.

Adolescent Development

The research effectively synthesized in *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*¹⁰ recognized that adolescents differ from adults in three important ways:

- adolescents are less able to regulate their own behavior in emotionally charged contexts;
- adolescents are more sensitive to external influences such as the presence of peers and the immediacy of rewards; and
- adolescents are less able to make informed decisions that require consideration of the long term.

These adolescent characteristics provide the foundation for the adoption and implementation of developmentally informed practices, policies, and procedures that have proven effective in achieving the primary responsibilities of the juvenile justice system, which include accountability, prevention of reoffending, and fairness and equitable treatment. The presenting challenge includes increasing the numbers and array of system practitioners who understand and embrace the research findings and implications; adopting systemic youth and family intervention practices across the spectrum of key decision points directly impacting the primary goals of the youth justice system; and creating and maintaining quality assurance methodologies that ensure fidelity to these principles and practices.

Collaborative Leadership

The underlying premise for a developmental approach to system reform provides the strongest case yet for system partners to find common ground around which to build a strong collaborative foundation. In particular, the partners must include judges, prosecuting and defense attorneys, court administration, probation, community service partners, law enforcement, and education. Given this scientific basis, professional practitioners can collectively recognize that during this period of adolescence, youth actively engage in risky decision-making in relation to authority at home, in school, and in the community. Our efforts to ameliorate the risk to reoffend and provide opportunities for positive behavior change and cognitive skills development, that can reduce reoffending and protect community safety, will not succeed alone or in a professional vacuum. Collaboration is not merely a concept; rather it is a dynamic and detailed set of connected actions achieved through the development and adoption of policies, procedures, and protocols effectively overseen by the collaborative partnership. According to research on collaborative practices, if the appropriate people are “brought together in constructive ways and with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization and the community.”¹¹

VOICES FROM THE FIELD Greene County, Missouri

“We now have an organization that has better span of control, better communication and better change management techniques, all of which will aid in better serving our youth and families.”

William “Bill” Prince, Greene County Family Court Administrator and Chief Juvenile Officer, 31st Judicial Circuit (Springfield, Missouri)

Implementation Science / Change Management

In recent years, the RFK National Resource Center has expanded the Probation System Review process to incorporate the principles of and research regarding Implementation Science (IS). In a growing number of jurisdictions, enhanced technical assistance supported the development of the infrastructure, methods, and activities that a probation department and court service administration need to implement the recommendations made through a probation and juvenile justice system review. IS, described as “the study of factors that influence the full and effective use of

innovations in practice,¹² incorporates a focus on two sets of activities (intervention-level activity and implementation-level activity) and two sets of outcomes (intervention outcomes and implementation outcomes) when translating action-plan strategies for community supervision practices. The development of expert Implementation Teams, led by local “implementation drivers” who possess authority and subject matter expertise, has intentionally disturbed the status quo among stakeholders, in particular among community supervision and probation practitioners. Consistent with the research, these local Implementation Teams have refined a complex set of routines in participant sites to enable full and effective use of the designed innovations.

Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Tools

After more than two decades of research that confirmed the efficacy of scientifically validated, structured decision-making instruments to screen and assess for risk of reoffending, there is still a significant gap between the research and practice. In view of the neuroscience of adolescents, instead of basing responses solely on the offense, a more effective approach is to assess each youth's risk for reoffending and reserve the most intensive monitoring and interventions (including both therapeutic services and sanctions) for those at highest risk. In addition, evidence suggests that the best results come from matching services to youths' specific “dynamic risk factors” (e.g., substance misuse, poor school achievement, or lack of parental monitoring). Further, with a strong commitment to RNR tools, justice system practitioners can more effectively target positive youth development opportunities that focus on increasing competency and cognitive skills development.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) / Growth-Focused Case Management (GFCM)

These two compatible approaches focus on youth engagement in case planning and highlight the connection of young people to positive, pro-social connections and aspirational goal setting to support desistance of problem behaviors.

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach erodes the deficit-based approach that still dominates many of our juvenile justice and probation system paradigms for case management, and acknowledges that youth are capable of stabilizing maladaptive behaviors if connected to a variety of social resources that facilitate healthy development. In the past decade, concentrating on PYD goals has provided the youth justice system with a compelling framework for service delivery. PYD asserts that reducing offending means not simply restricting opportunities to offend, but expanding opportunities to grow. The practices associated with an effective PYD approach support development of more mature patterns

of thinking, reasoning, and decision-making.¹³ In combination with the appropriate use of RNR approaches, case management plans can incorporate PYD opportunities that strengthen cognitive skills and positive assets to ameliorate risk in the priority domains for intervention.

The approach of Growth-Focused Case Management (GFCM) supports the formation of a positive identity and highlights it as the central developmental task of adolescence.¹⁴ It is what youth do in order to “grow up” or increase in maturity. It is also a primary way in which youthful offenders desist offending.¹⁵ Therefore, an evidence-based strategy — which also protects community safety and respects victims' rights — is to **develop and manage case plans with youth** that facilitate formation of a positive identity with which offending is no longer compatible.¹⁶ The goals of GFCM work together to protect community safety and victims' rights through practices that assist youth in maturing out of offending¹⁷ (i.e., desistance):

1. Interact with youth in an organized and positive manner;
2. Facilitate growth experiences through involvement in case planning; and
3. Foster positive identity formation and desistance.

The core practice facilitates and supports developmental tasks to address the goals and help a youth develop their ideal future self.¹⁸

Trauma Screening & Treatment

The growing awareness of the effect of trauma has led to the need for interventions that take into account its relevance in the lives of youth with behavior problems and potential involvement in the juvenile justice and related youth-serving systems.¹⁹ The first step to identify appropriate interventions is the identification of youth for whom behavioral health treatment is necessary. Together with trauma-based interventions, methods to specifically screen and assess youth for active trauma symptoms are critical to improving the likelihood for successful behavior change and amelioration of risk to reoffend.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Fairfax County, Virginia

“By combining the increased use of diversion and assessment instruments to inform disposition recommendations in Court, the CSU has reduced the number of low-risk youth entering the justice system and ordered on probation.”

Robert “Bob” Bermingham, Court Service Unit Director (retired November 2021), Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court (Fairfax, Virginia)

Alternative Responses / Diversion

An abundance of credible research supports the need for early screening and appropriate diversion for low-risk youth and reveals that low-risk youth are unlikely to reoffend if there is no intervention.²⁰ However, low-risk youth mixed with high-risk youth can create a contagion effect and can actually increase the risk that youth will reoffend. Further studies identify that unnecessary involvement in the juvenile justice system can increase recidivism as reflected by the fact that youth placed on probation were 12 times more likely to be arrested as an adult than those youth who were not placed on probation.²¹ When combined with individualized program and service interventions availed through the community and outside of the youth justice system, alternative responses to formal prosecution can disrupt a pattern of delinquent activity for youth.

Family Involvement and Engagement

The active engagement and involvement of families — which by definition includes the nuclear, single parent or guardian, and extended family units — must be based on their strengths and assets, and provide for an active role and partnership in the development, implementation, and management of comprehensive treatment plans for their children. Adolescent youth rely on the family, the primary natural support, to provide guidance, instruction, and nurturance no matter the level of dysfunction; our efforts must seek to enhance and not supplant that support system in both the short- and long-term. The research is clear that absent the meaningful engagement and involvement of families in our planning and interventions there is a decreased likelihood of achieving the positive outcomes we seek for our youth. In fact, research reflects that working together with families to reach agreement on action plans reduces court time and costs and families more rapidly avail themselves to services.²²

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) / Quality Assurance (QA)

The oft-ignored practice of developing an effective continuous quality-learning environment and quality assurance capacity is essential to create or strengthen the tangible outcomes, measures, and benchmarks for each key system practice area. CQI practices contribute to oversight, monitoring, and support and coaching for fidelity to best-practice approaches. QA systems informed by routine data collection, management, and reporting policies and procedures support data-informed decision-making and accountability. When these data are woven into job expectations and individual system performance evaluations, youth justice systems and stakeholders can collaboratively achieve optimal system performance and youth outcomes.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR SOUGHT OUTCOMES (SYSTEM AND YOUTH)

The RFK National Resource Center has focused on improving the effective and consistent use of quantitative and qualitative data to inform youth justice policy, practice, and system improvement since its launch. Data collection, management, and routine reporting is imperative — although too often not incorporated into routine practice — resulting in an overreliance on anecdotal evidence to guide current practice and opportunities for innovation. Renowned data analyst and researcher Gene Siegel wrote, “One of the most important aspects of the suggested data planning approach is to encourage jurisdictions to aspire toward achieving more dynamic or ‘real time’ data capabilities rather than relying on single point in time data ‘snapshots.’” Siegel correctly indicates, “Having more dynamic or real time data allows for active tracking of any group of cases and helps administrators, program managers, on the ground staff, and others enhance their abilities to do their work more effectively. Real time data can help juvenile justice program managers be more proactive rather than reactive and can enable them to address critical programmatic concerns and events before they become serious problems. Real time or more current data ... can help jurisdictions monitor short and long-term program performance indicators and outcomes.”^{iv,23} This guidance applies evenly to system performance and youth outcomes.

Between the spring of 2019 and 2021, the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) conducted formal data capacity

iv The author (Siegel, 2016) notes “Readers should recognize that while the principles and examples laid out in this article reflect strategies geared toward a DSY initiative, the same examples and principles can be applied and/or **adapted to examine broader probation reform efforts** or any practice improvements that impact juvenile justice-involved youth.”

assessments (DCA) in each of the six Mondoro Project jurisdictions. The DCA process maximizes opportunities to incorporate routine data reporting among probation, juvenile court, attorneys, and judicial personnel that informs continuous quality improvement and quality assurance within the youth justice system. The DCA interview protocols and procedures were developed during an OJJDP-sponsored Juvenile Justice Model Data Project. Led by NCJJ, the Juvenile Justice Model Data Project proposed 86 Fundamental Measures for Juvenile Justice (FMJJ) for monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of juvenile justice systems from arrest through youth reentry from secure placements and 40 additional supporting youth and system-referral characteristics. The combination of expert guidance and instruction driven by Siegel and NCJJ research-informed approaches created opportunities in each Mondoro Project jurisdiction for enhanced data collection, management, and reporting capacity.

Among the critical priorities within all six jurisdictions, system performance and youth outcomes included:

- ✦ commitment to multiple stakeholders' proficiency of understanding and application of adolescent development at each key decision point in the youth justice system
- ✦ an increased number of youth diverted from formal involvement that do not reoffend (often low-risk/high-need youth)
- ✦ decrease in out-of-home placement (including secure detention) and a corresponding reduction in average length of stay
- ✦ decrease in the disproportionality of youth of color involved in the youth justice system
- ✦ an increase in the number of youth whose trauma, mental health, substance misuse, and educational needs are identified and treated so as to ameliorate their risk to re-offend
- ✦ measurable improvement in family engagement in case planning and management
- ✦ increased access and connection to positive youth development resources
- ✦ decreased numbers of youth populating community supervision caseloads without compromising community safety
- ✦ enhanced cross-system coordination resulting in improved access to appropriate community-based interventions
- ✦ case processing timelines being reduced
- ✦ quality of dispositional reports relying on risk-need-responsivity case planning instruments enhancing the efficacy of judicial orders and prioritization of dynamic

risk factors to realize positive behavior change in targeted domains, and

- ✦ an increased percentage of early and successful probation case closures combined with reduced recidivism rates for these youth

This set of impressive outcomes, while not exhaustive, represents many of the hard-earned achievements realized within the Mondoro Project by all six jurisdictions. The system improvements and enhanced youth outcomes were a manifestation of courageous leadership, innovation, collaboration, and diligence across youth justice agencies and among employees at all levels within the six jurisdictions. The process for achieving these results is replicable.

SITE SELECTION

The RFK National Resource Center competitively selected six jurisdictions in two sequenced cohorts for participation in the project. The initial phase of site selection included three jurisdictions that had recently completed a probation and juvenile justice system review using the RFK National Resource Center's seminal framework and were ready to implement an endorsed set of recommendations. This initial cohort was therefore in line to demonstrate evidence-based, implementation activities and a longer period of measurable system improvement and youth outcomes over the course of the project. The second cohort of three jurisdictions, selected the following year, undertook a probation and juvenile justice system review. The second cohort's practical experiences ensured opportunities for replicable system improvement lessons informing preparation, planning, and mobilization of key stakeholders combined with simultaneous support for building of change management and reform infrastructure and capacity.

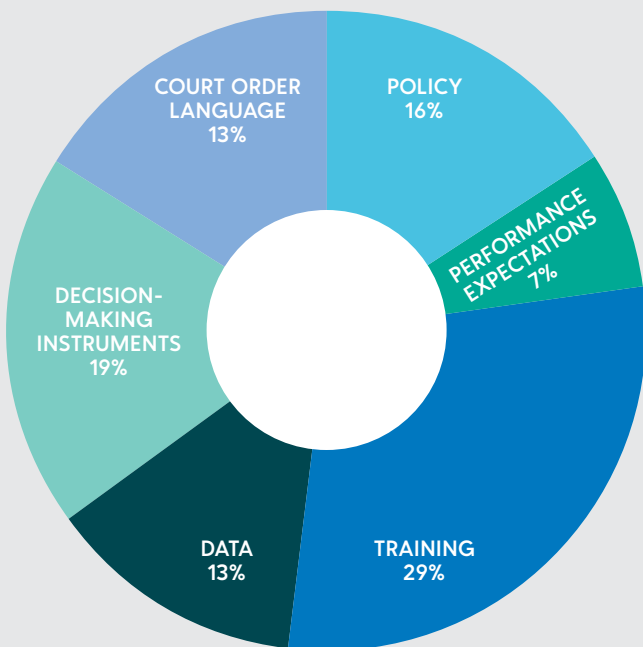
The selection of participant jurisdictions included ***“a review of those jurisdictions that demonstrated motivation and readiness to implement system improvement plans targeting potential action at every key decision point in the youth justice system.”*** Additionally, the RFK National Resource Center in coordination with OJJDP Project staff, assessed jurisdictional commitment to ***“an emphasis on enhanced policies and practices that result in early identification and targeted, evidence-based interventions for the trauma and behavioral health service needs for medium- and high-risk youth who require community supervision.”*** The RFK National Resource Center interviewed jurisdictional leaders to assess their readiness and commitment to:

- ✦ engage in activities consistent with implementation science and change management to improve their organizational infrastructure to drive and manage change

- retain and/or enhance their collaborative leadership
- seek the achievement of prioritized system and youth outcomes
- prioritize attention to the population of youth with co-occurring disorders through commitment to a comprehensive system of behavioral health screening and assessment to routinely include trauma, and
- enhance and refine their data collection and reporting capacities while also focusing on advancing continuous quality improvement methods to ensure sustainability of best practices and approaches.

These components of preparation, planning, and organizational approach provide critically important instruction, framing, and guidance for probation/community supervision and juvenile justice systems that may be considering opportunities

THEMES: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS COMMON AMONG TWO OR MORE SITES



Court Order Language: Understandable with treatment conditions that are designed to ameliorate risk.

Policy: Institutionalize vision, mission, and best practices

Performance Expectations: Establish competencies for staff and update roles and responsibilities to align with best practices, ensuring continuous learning

Decision Making Instruments: Consistent use of risk, need, behavioral health screening and assessment

Data: Collection, management, and reporting of fundamental measures for system performance and youth outcomes

Training: Enhance training, coaching, and mentoring of all juvenile justice personnel and key stakeholders

for their own youth justice system improvement and enhanced youth outcomes.

The six courageous and committed jurisdictions selected for participation in the **Dennis M. Mondoro Probation and Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Project** included:

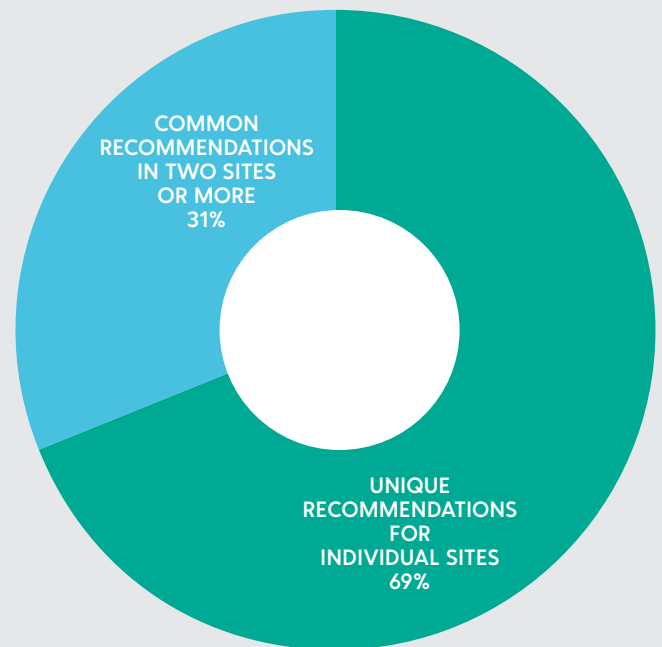
Cohort 1 (selected in December 2018)

- Clark County (Las Vegas), Nevada
- Fairfax County (Washington, DC suburban area), Virginia
- Lancaster County (Lincoln), Nebraska

Cohort 2 (selected in November 2019)

- Dutchess County, New York
- Greene County (Springfield), Missouri
- King County (Seattle), Washington

COMMON VS. UNIQUE RECOMMENDATIONS AMONG MONDORO SITES



The majority of findings and recommendations emerging from the Probation System Review analysis are unique to the practices and policies of each individual jurisdiction.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The RFK National Resource Center has a long history of engaging with partner organizations and experts in a variety of fields to augment the expertise provided to jurisdictions undertaking reform. The Mondoro Project featured opportunities to provide selected jurisdictions with a remarkably distinguished team of experts with whom we collaborated to achieve the goals of the project and the unique priorities within each site.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Lancaster County, Nebraska

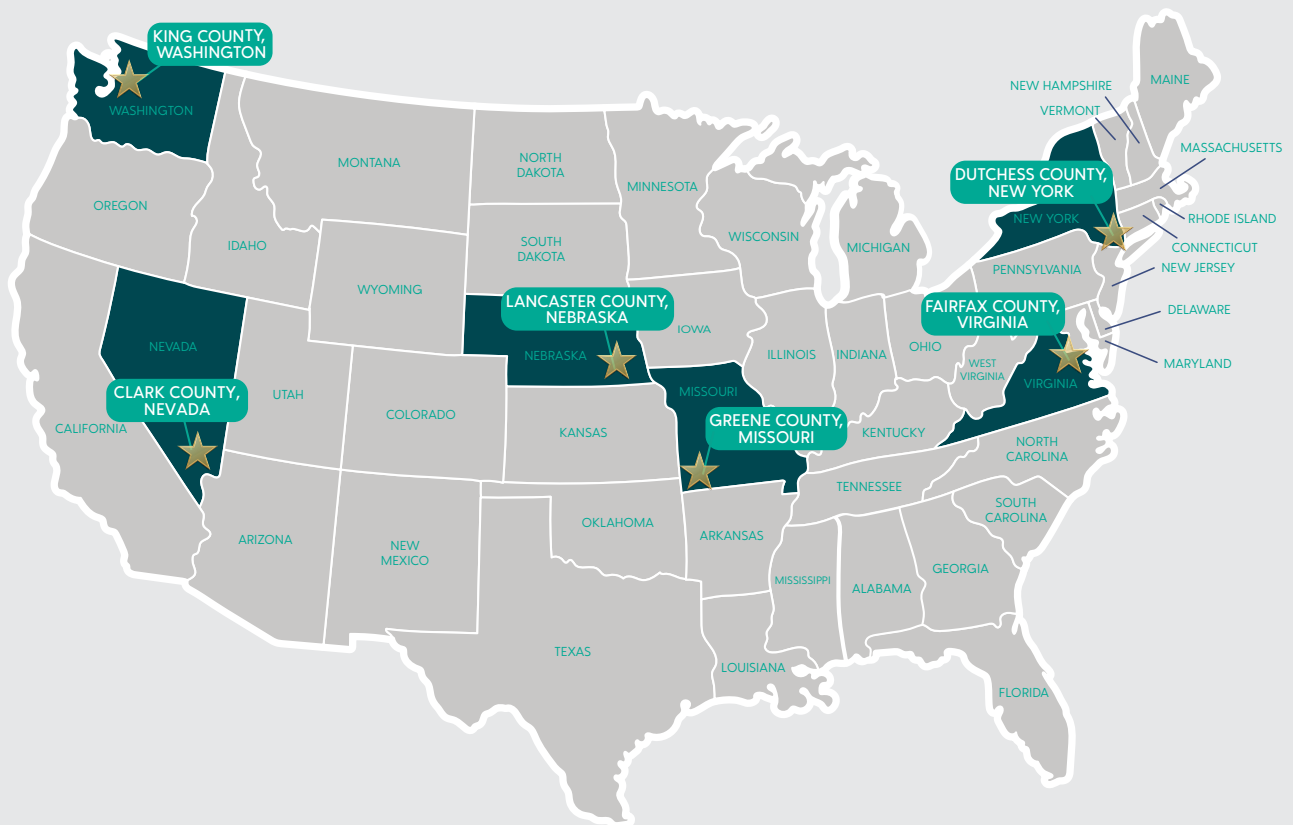
“The review ensured open communication, recommendations focused on probation specifically and feedback from experts with years of experience and knowledge to help move the recommendations into real action.”

Kari Rumbaugh, Assistant Deputy Administrator,
Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation
(Lincoln, Nebraska)

University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, The Impact Center at Frank Porter Graham (The Impact Center)

A key innovation embedded Implementation Science (IS) in every phase of technical assistance. During initial project design, IS informed planning and early building of system and organizational readiness for anticipated reforms. At the outset, The Impact Center introduced foundational IS concepts to project leaders and site teams convened together in Fairfax, Virginia. By introducing IS early, RFK National Resource Center communicated and modeled the critical importance for teams to adopt IS as a core organizational strategy. Adult learning and practice experiences helped the overall project team and individual site teams learn about foundational co-creation processes and key implementation capacities required for achieving successful outcomes. Capacities include functional and effective leadership/teaming structures, workforce development systems, continuous quality improvement (CQI) learning systems, media strategies, communication, and networking systems. These foundational concepts are known in the IS practice literature to substantially impact implementation outcomes.

The Impact Center conducted on-site visits that allowed deeper, tailored adult learning and organizational development activities. A key theme emerged in each location around leaders



and supervisors needing assistance with change management while simultaneously building readiness for reforms. Constant influx of new or modified policies, innovations, and programs interfere with necessary training of change leaders in complex problem-solving or change management techniques. IS offers new skills and strategies to address these inevitable challenges. As a critical element of future success, each site had many layers of internal and external collaborating partners. Bringing collaborators into co-creation and implementation processes takes time and patience. High-functioning organizations often take 2-4 years to successfully implement and sustain an innovation. Deliberate attention to co-creation is a critically important implementation function to ensure a hospitable environment for reform activities. The on-site sessions allowed opportunities for engagement, multilevel readiness building, learning, preliminary capacity assessments, and gathering of data informing implementation planning. Observations and experiences reflected known IS practice research findings. A key result from the IS approach produced re-allocation of staff time devoted to leading and participating in implementation teams dedicated to change management and priority reforms. Combined with consistent executive leadership supporting such teams, multiple Mondoro Project sites experienced measurably stronger implementation improvements (as opposed to layering implementation responsibilities on top of already heavily tasked leaders/staff). Juvenile justice systems require high levels of adaptive, innovative leadership, willingness to change, interests in new learning and effective data collection related to implementation activities. The Impact Center provided invaluable guidance, instruction, and support to create an effective continuous learning infrastructure and sustainability of new and innovative practices.

National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ), the Research Division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

To support the ability of Mondoro Project jurisdictions to pursue the 86 Fundamental Measures for Juvenile Justice (FMJJ), NCJJ developed a 3-dimensional (3D) data capacity self-assessment (3-D Assessment) to address dimensions of infrastructure, data use and dissemination, and specific performance indicators within the juvenile justice system.²⁴ Between the spring of 2019 and 2021, the NCJJ conducted data capacity assessments (DCA) in each of the six Mondoro Project demonstration jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction received a unique DCA report (15-20 pages) that provided:

- ✦ background to the development of the FMJJ
- ✦ 3D assessments
- ✦ description of key data infrastructure
- ✦ list of strengths upon which to build

- ✦ list of key data challenges, and
- ✦ recommendations unique to each site for addressing those challenges.

In conjunction with findings and recommendations from the probation and juvenile justice system review, the DCA report assisted local leadership in prioritizing quality assurance and data system recommendations. Important advances and innovative highlights realized through this focus include:

- ✦ 50% of the jurisdictions either created data analyst positions for the first time or expanded existing capacity for more positions creating a unit
- ✦ 50% developed new documented competencies for existing research positions
- ✦ 33% created “data dashboards” for the first time or expanded their existing dashboards into additional topics that were aligned with the FMJJ and the PSRs recommendations
- ✦ 67% tailored newly developed performance measurement plans using the FMJJ
- ✦ 50% expanded their annual juvenile justice statistical reports and revised their internal performance reports
- ✦ 50% revised existing client and parent surveys or implemented performance measurement surveys for the first time, and
- ✦ Peer mentoring cohorts in each jurisdiction benefitted from cross-sharing position descriptions, data visualizations, and performance report examples.

Keith Cruise, PhD, Director of Clinical Training, Department of Psychiatry, Fordham University / Director, Behavioral Health Screening Services, National Youth Screening and Assessment Partners, LLC

Based on extensive experience that supports targeted screening methods to identify active trauma symptoms, including development of a Trauma Informed Decision Protocol (TIDP), Dr. Cruise trained, coached, and mentored selected sites in the integration of effective trauma screening with mental health screening and RNR probation case planning and management. The seminal training approach provided by Dr. Cruise ensured deliberate attention on the identification and treatment for the comprehensive behavioral health needs that are critical to successful cessation of future delinquency and positive behavior change among court- and probation-involved youth with behavioral health needs.

The Gault Center (formerly known as the National Juvenile Defender Center)

In conjunction with the Probation System Review and report of findings and recommendations, the Gault Center conducted

an analysis of opportunities for improvements to existing juvenile probation orders. The Gault Center engaged in a collaborative consultation process with juvenile court stakeholders in each of the identified jurisdictions to review materials and information shared by the jurisdictions to conduct an analysis of the probation order document(s) and process. An established jurisdictional workgroup and reviews of pertinent documents and perspectives on provisions of the current orders informed the analysis. The primary foci included assessment of the consistency between the mission and goals of the probation department and the language and terms of the probation orders. The Gault Center assessment and report highlighted four key issues:

1. **Readability** - the reading level and language structure of youth probation orders
2. **Number of conditions** - research indicates that rules of probation are most effective when they contain a few clear and targeted objectives
3. **Standard conditions and individualized conditions** - identifying a limited number of conditions that could be standard for every youth provides a clear set of objectives while still holding youth accountable. A majority of the other conditions can be categorized as individualized (or youth-specific) and are only ordered where there is a reason to require that particular condition of that particular young person, and
4. **Effectiveness and legality of conditions** - conditions on probation orders should be rooted in both law and best practice.

The ultimate goal of the Gault Center analysis and implementation support sought adoption of enhanced probation orders aligned with the above referenced key issues in each Mondoro Project jurisdiction. Developing probation orders that are rooted in the philosophy of probation geared toward youth success and accountability will lead to better outcomes for youth and enhanced community safety.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

King County, Washington

"We are already seeing the benefits and progress offered by such a focused effort to align our needs and priorities and, ultimately, create better outcomes for youth in King County. As they say, 'Trust the process.'"

Paul Daniels, Director, Juvenile Court Services, King County Superior Court (Seattle, Washington)

ACHIEVEMENTS

The Mondoro Project sought to accelerate juvenile justice system improvement by standardizing effective administrative and management approaches, aligning probation practices and court operations with research to optimize performance and outcomes, enhancing inter-agency collaboration, and developing continuous quality improvement methods and performance measures that contribute to sustainability of reforms. The achievements highlighted within each jurisdiction reflect significant progression in each of these areas. The processes for achieving these advances **are replicable in your youth justice system — whether taken on individually or as a set of practices interwoven throughout all of the key decision points**. Given the commitment each jurisdiction made to developing quality assurance for each reform, there is also qualitative and quantitative data available to reinforce the highlighted areas below and the anecdotal evidence of their positive impact. The Mondoro Project site-based leadership has indicated their willingness to share, coach, and mentor companion juvenile justice leaders detailing how these positive system improvements and youth outcomes were achieved.

COHORT 1

Clark County, Nevada

Clark County, located in the southeast corner of the state, is the nation's 13th-largest county and provides extensive regional services to more than 2.3 million citizens and more than 45.6 million visitors a year (2019). Las Vegas is the county seat.

Population: 2,292,476 (2021 Census)

Probation Department (within the Court Service Unit):

93 (77 Juvenile Probation Officers)

Total # of Juvenile Judges: Two Family Division District Court Judges, Two Hearing Masters

Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System (2021): 4630

Total Juvenile Offenses: 10,841

🌿 Felony: 36%

🌿 Misdemeanor: 52%

🌿 Other: 12%

Achievements:

1. Nevada adopted statutory reform that required the training and implementation of the Youth Level of Service – Case Management Inventory (YLS-CMI). During the Probation System Review and implementation period of the Mondoro Project, Clark County developed policies, procedures, and practices for compliance with the statute adopted in January 2020. This process involved discard of previous policies reliant on un-validated instruments and report

formats and encountered significant resistance from the experienced probation staff and several key justice system partners. Staff transitions, including both departures and new appointments, accompanied the ultimately successful YLS-CMI implementation into practice. The Clark County Juvenile Probation Division created a specialized assessment unit (Assessment Court Report Unit (ACRU)) to ensure adherence and inter-rater reliability to fidelity of the YLS-CMI.

- Juvenile Probation amended multiple policies and procedures to reflect operational expectations and practices that emphasize positive youth development and application of a developmental approach to case management reflecting an understanding of the neuroscience of adolescent brain development. This action resulted in an updated Probation Practice Manual from which probation management could train staff on best practice expectations as detailed in policy and protocols.
- Juvenile Probation amended multiple Juvenile Intake policies to reflect an increasing reliance on The Harbor (local Juvenile Assessment Center) that produced enhanced opportunities to divert from filing a formal petition and permitting improved assessment of community treatment and services necessary to reduce future engagement with the juvenile court.
- Juvenile Sexual Offender Unit (serving more than 200 youth annually) revised its policies and procedures that enhanced the emphasis for clinical evaluation and assessment. The process resulted in a first-time articulation of specific outcome measures used to evaluate success with the specialized population of youth.
- The Clark County Department of Juvenile Justice Services (DJJS) doubled the Quality Assurance – Continuous Quality Improvement Unit staff level to reflect a new commitment to collecting, managing, and reporting data on specific outcomes and measures. The new FTRAC data system was in process of implementation throughout the Mondoro Project and permitted commitment to the Fundamental Measures for Juvenile Justice (FMJJ) to inform the decisions on critical data attributes populating the new system operationalization.
- Probation Management and Clark County DJJS introduced the Growth-Focused Case Management approach and secured training and technical assistance to assist in implementation to support DJJS/Juvenile Probation's commitment to positive youth development approaches in probation case management.

Fairfax County, Virginia

Located in the heart of northern Virginia, Fairfax County borders both the City of Alexandria and Arlington County and forms part of the suburban ring of Washington, D.C.

Population: 1,150,309 (2020 Census)

(Population estimates from July 1, 2021: 1,139,720)

Probation Department (within the Court Service Unit): 211

🌿 Probation Counselor (I, II, and III level): 181

🌿 Probation Supervisors: 30

Total # of Juvenile Judges: Eight

Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System through Juvenile Intake (FY22): 1436

🌿 Misdemeanor: 41%

🌿 Felony: 31%

Achievements:

- The Court Service Unit's (CSU) Senior Management Team worked closely with judicial leadership and multiple key juvenile justice and community partners (e.g., law enforcement, schools, service providers, prosecuting attorneys and public defenders) to form the Transformation Team. The multi-disciplinary group met routinely to co-create policy changes and amendments, problem solve, and exchange qualitative and quantitative data reflecting progress or challenges affecting priority areas of juvenile justice reform.
- The CSU created and defined a Special Projects Coordinator position to assist in multiple organizational, logistics, and problem-solving issues that confronted the probation and juvenile justice system review and implementation process.
- In coordination with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office (prosecutor), law enforcement and school personnel, the Intake Department of the CSU expanded opportunities for alternative responses to referrals and/or formal prosecution. The approach featured the enhancement of the Fairfax County Police Alternative Accountability Program (AAP) that permitted police to refer youth to programs and services without filing a referral to the juvenile court. This practice has resulted in increased diversion rates and has positively affected rates of youth of color entering the juvenile justice system.
- The CSU created a dynamic, adult learning style Adolescent Brain Development (ABD) Training (90 minutes) that requires demonstration of proficiency of understanding of the principles of adolescent development as applied in the juvenile justice system. The training has been introduced among key stakeholders within the juvenile justice system (e.g., judges, attorneys, etc.).

5. Building upon an 18-month demonstration project within two courtrooms, the Bifurcation process (adjudication-disposition conducted in separate proceedings) was adopted by consensus of all affected parties in all eight courtrooms. The project separated adjudication and disposition hearings to ensure consideration of the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) prepared by a specialized Assessment Unit and included within a newly structured Pre-Dispositional Investigation (PDI) report.
6. CSU's Research and Development Unit (R&D) is comprised of four full-time staff and regularly respond to data inquiries related to system performance, program outcomes, and youth outcomes. The Unit's staff are present in every Senior Management meeting. The R&D assisted throughout the reform process as "co-creators" while reinforcing the CSU commitment to dynamic or real time data. This capacity permits active tracking to help administrators, program managers, probation staff, and other system practitioners enhance their abilities to improve, sustain and measure the impact of their reforms.
7. CSU created an enhanced training and implementation plan to support improved continuous quality improvement (CQI) methods of practice throughout the unit. The approach focused on teaching, coaching, and mentoring to achieve the desired consistency and effectiveness of practice among probation supervisors and counselors, and specifically targeted reliability and application of the YASI.

Lancaster County, Nebraska

Lancaster County, Nebraska is located in the far southeastern area of the state of Nebraska. It is the second largest county in the state of Nebraska and is the home of the state capital.

Population: 330,048 (2022 Census)

Probation staff: 62 (35 Probation Officers)

Total # of Juvenile Judges: Four

Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System (2021):

467 Delinquency filings

✿ Misdemeanor offenses: 336

✿ Felony offenses: 118

✿ Transfer cases from out-of-county jurisdictions: 13

Petitions Filed (2021): 388

✿ Status Offense Petitions: 199

✿ Revocation Motion Petitions: 189

Achievements:

1. Juvenile Probation created a seminal Adolescent Brain Development (ABD) Training Curriculum (6 modules)

that will serve as the product for use across the state of Nebraska and has been introduced to multiple other state and local jurisdictions. The curriculum interactively teaches and requires demonstration of proficiency of understanding of the principles of adolescent development as applied in the juvenile justice system. The training has been re-produced in a 90-minute format for key stakeholder groups (e.g., judges, attorneys, etc.). The ABD core principles are incorporated into the revised Probation Policies and Procedures Manual.

2. The juvenile justice stakeholders created routine inter-agency meetings that included judges, county attorney (prosecutor), and public defenders with the explicit purpose to co-create policy changes and amendments, problem solve, and exchange qualitative and quantitative data reflecting progress or challenges affecting juvenile justice reform. The data sharing was supported by the regular dissemination of newsletters among probation staff and stakeholders that featured data dashboards reflecting trends and progress for each established priority area of reform.
3. Juvenile Probation embraced a partnership with the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation (AOCP) to create and define a position of Project Coordinator to assist in multiple organizational, logistics, and problem-solving issues that confronted the probation and juvenile justice system review and implementation process.
4. Upon adoption of the recommendations presented in the Probation System Review Final Report, Juvenile Probation created teams of staff at all levels to "co-create" the implementation plan, goals, objectives, timelines, assigned tasks and responsibilities, and measurable outcomes for each prioritized topic area.
5. A collaboration comprised of probation personnel (officers, supervisors, and management), judges, and attorneys created a revised case closure process designed to increase early and successful closure of probation cases. The replicable process created a consensus driven, new reporting process for judicial consideration that focused on reduction of risk as indicated by Youth Level of Service - Case Management Inventory (YLS-CMI) re-assessment. In two years of operation, Juvenile Probation has exceeded their benchmark goals and nearly doubled their early and successful case closure rate (15% to 29%). Among that population of successful closures, the recidivism rate has substantially declined and produced a 25%

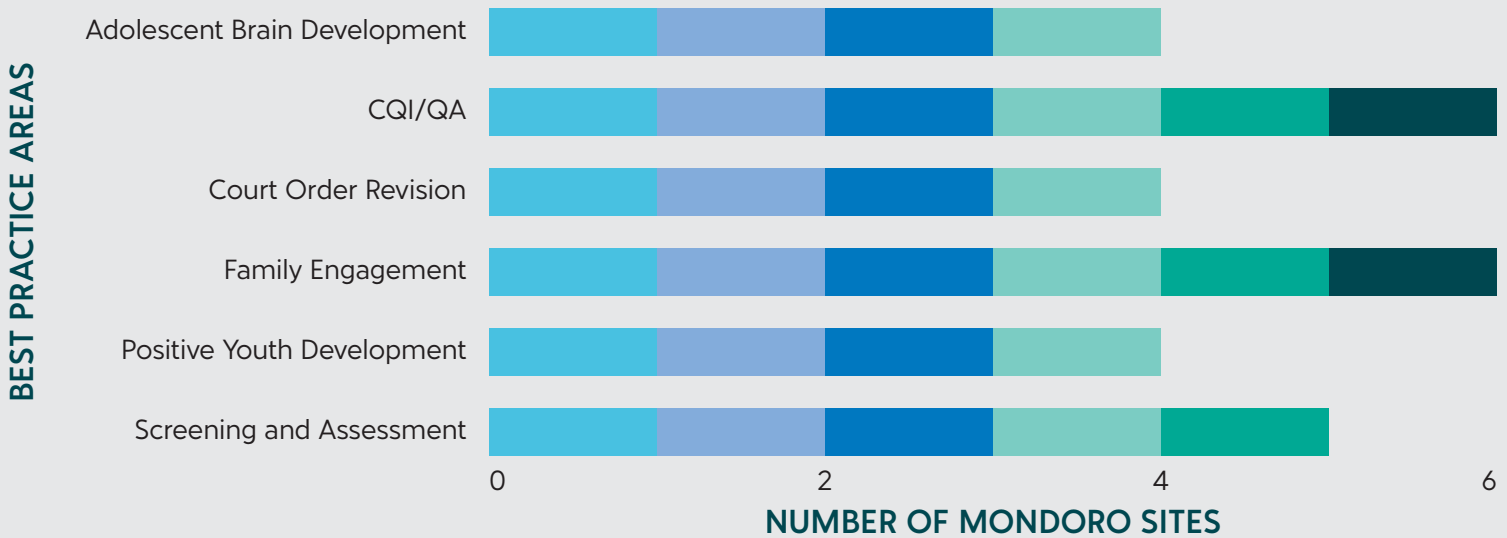
reduction in the overall recidivism rate among all probation youth (including high-risk youth).

- Juvenile Probation created new procedures and case management expectations consistent with family engagement research for application in every case involving probation oversight. The tools produced included scripts for interaction of staff with families and caregivers at every point of interaction (e.g., introduction, hearing expectations, case planning, case management, responses to behavioral transgression) and follow-up survey instruments to enhance evaluation of these methods and provide

voice to families about their experience with probation and the courts.

- Resulting from the Gault Center's Probation Orders Analysis and recommendations, a collaboration comprised of probation personnel (officers, supervisors, and management), judges, and attorneys created a new Desktop Guide designed to minimize unnecessary probation conditions and target critical treatment and service provisions resulting from the Youth Level of Service - Case Management Inventory (YLS-CMI) assessment methodology presented for consideration at dispositional hearings.

NUMBER OF MONDORO SITES WITH RECOMMENDATIONS IN BEST PRACTICE AREAS



COHORT 2

Dutchess County, New York

Dutchess County is located about 90 miles north of New York City and approximately equidistant from Albany (state capital). The county is home to Poughkeepsie, its largest city with a population of 42,942, situated in the eastern half of New York State.

Population: 294,000 (2020 Census)

Total number of staff: 104 (including leadership, officers, and admin/support)

Total # of Family Court Judges: Four

Referrals to Office of Probation and Community Corrections: 154

🌊 Juvenile Delinquent Appearance Tickets: 86 (55.8%)

🌊 PINS (Persons in Need of Supervision): 68 (44.2%)

Achievements:

- Dutchess County Office of Probation and Community Corrections (OPCC) incorporated multiple policies and

procedures to reflect operational expectations and practices that emphasize positive youth development and application of a developmental approach to case management reflecting an understanding of the neuroscience of adolescent brain development.

- OPCC embraced and strengthened a partnership with the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services - Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives to reinforce shared learning and improve opportunities to create replicable policies and practices. The partnership assisted in multiple organizational, logistics, and problem-solving issues that confronted the probation and juvenile justice review and implementation process.
- OPCC implemented a trauma screening methodology as part of an overall commitment to an improved behavioral health screening and assessment process for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
- OPCC created and implemented a service matrix to augment the improved behavioral health assessment process and the translation of the Youth Assessment

and Screening Instrument (YASI) into a case plan that effectively identified specific service and treatment interventions to ameliorate risk and support positive behavior change.

5. OPCC created a new quality assurance system informed by the Fundamental Measures in Juvenile Justice (FMJJ) and added a new Data Analyst position to reinforce the commitment to data collection, management, and reporting.

Greene County, Missouri

Greene County is located in the southwest quadrant of Missouri and is home to the city of Springfield.

Population: 294,997 (2020 Census)

Probation Department/Division Staff (occupied positions):

Juvenile Probation currently consists of a Chief Juvenile Officer/Family Court administrator, Director of Case Management overseeing a full-time Law/Status Unit Supervisor and six full-time Law/Status Juvenile Officers. Additionally, a Diversion Supervisor and three full-time Juvenile Diversion Officers staff the Department.

Total # of Juvenile Judges: One

Referrals to the Juvenile Office (2021): 1083

Achievements:

1. The Chief Juvenile Officer/Family Court Administrator established a Change Task Force within the Juvenile Office of the 31st Judicial District of Missouri to develop a plan for restructuring the management and leadership. Immediate action on the recommendations of the Change Task Force established a cross-functional team (CFT) that apportioned leadership responsibilities across the CFT and ensured shared levels of oversight, coaching, and support. The management restructuring, informed by technical assistance from the UNC Impact Center, embraced core principles of change management and implementation science.
2. The Juvenile Office adopted a Three-Year Strategic Plan to guide the priorities and activities of the CFT and the agency. The plan included a renewed commitment to core principles of adolescent development, incentivized positive youth development practices, and case planning informed by risk-need-responsivity instruments.
3. The Greene County Youth Detention Facility closed temporarily following reports of staff misconduct. CFT enacted new policies that prioritized “adolescent development theory, trauma-informed care, and a strengths-based perspective” that was documented in a new policy manual. Additionally, new hiring criteria and training requirements accompanied action on

a staffing ratio analysis that led to additional reforms prior to the re-opening of the facility in December 2021.

4. The Juvenile Office amended principles and policies for juvenile officers to reinforce the state's requirement to administer the Missouri Juvenile Justice Assessment instrument and assure consistent integration of adolescent development and positive youth development practices in case planning. Similarly, the Juvenile Office amended case staffing procedures to involve the agency's Clinical professional as a primary collaborator with the juvenile officer.
5. The Juvenile Office expanded the Data Analyst role to include placement on the new CFT leadership and expanded the quality assurance capacity by adding staff to support development and full implementation of enhanced performance measures for the system and youth outcomes.

King County, Washington


King County is the largest county by population in Washington State, located west of the Cascade Mountain range along the Puget Sound. King County is comprised of dense urban areas – including the county seat of Seattle – suburban areas east of Lake Washington, rural communities to the southeast, and mountain towns in the foothills of the Cascades.

Population: 2,269,675 (2020 Census)

Probation Department/Division Staff (occupied positions): 86

Total # of Juvenile Judges (incl. Magistrates/Masters/Referees): Two

Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System (2021): 1148 total

 Misdemeanor/Gross Misdemeanor: 54%

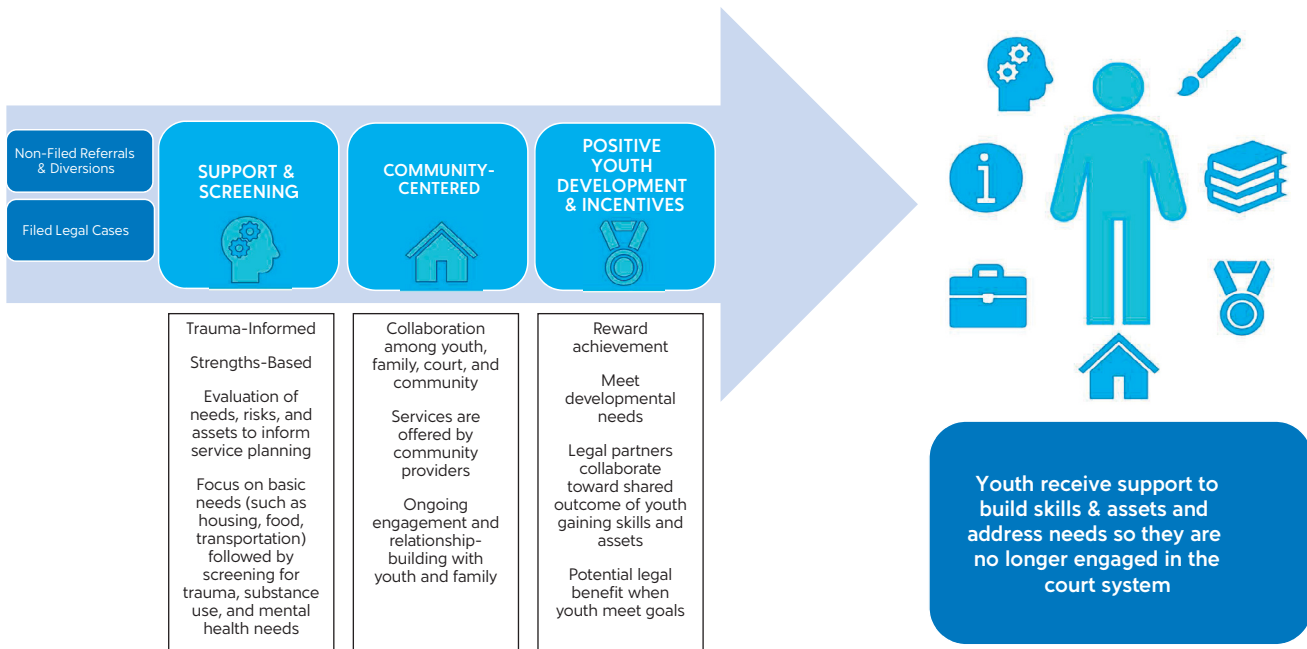
 Felony: 46%

Achievements:

1. In the wake of the departure of the Juvenile Court Services (JCS) Director, a triumvirate of leadership effectively functioned as a team to navigate through prolific change within the community and the Juvenile Court Services agency. This team committed to use of technical assistance and the Probation and Juvenile Justice System Review process to apply change management and implementation science core principles during the tumultuous period of transition.
2. Juvenile Court Services produced a revised Protocols and Procedures Manual to reflect the amended policies and operational expectations, emphasizing the focus on positive youth development and application of a developmental approach to case management demonstrating an understanding of the neuroscience of adolescent brain development.

JTRAC

JUVENILE THERAPEUTIC RESPONSE AND ACCOUNTABILITY COURT



- Juvenile Court Services adopted the Juvenile Therapeutic Response and Accountability Court (JTRAC) to reflect their commitment to early screening and assessment, community-centered approach, and positive youth justice and incentive-based approach to behavior change to avoid future engagement with the court (see "JTRAC Graphic"). Juvenile Court Services developed and provided extensive training of staff and sequenced the full adoption of the JTRAC to assure consistent application of the required practice among probation staff.
- Juvenile Court Services enhanced their commitment to data development informed by the Fundamental Measures for Juvenile Justice and its use among staff, key justice partners, and community stakeholders.
- Juvenile Court Services introduced the Growth-Focused Case Management approach and secured training and technical assistance to assist in implementation to support JCS commitment to positive youth development approaches in probation case management.

CONCLUSIONS – CRITICAL ELEMENTS TO ACHIEVE SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT, INNOVATION, AND TRANSFORMATION

The list of achievements in each jurisdiction is impressive and accompanied by replicable methods, processes, and

quantifiable results that can translate to other community and youth justice systems across the country. The Dennis M. Mondoro Probation and Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Project produced real-time opportunities in dynamic environments that included challenges familiar to all youth justice stakeholders. The pandemic covered a significant period of project activity and exacerbated the challenges confronting each jurisdiction and their workforce. The following list of barriers and obstacles is extensive and likely looks familiar:

- ❖ Absence of unified mission, vision, philosophy
- ❖ Outdated policies, procedures, and practices
- ❖ Adversarial political or community influence
- ❖ Lack of appropriate awareness and proficiency of understanding of adolescent development and positive youth development (PYD) approaches
- ❖ Ineffective or inconsistent quality improvement oversight
- ❖ Absence of meaningful data to inform system accountability and successful youth outcomes
- ❖ Critical stakeholders' operational practices conflict with court service/probation practices
- ❖ Existence of fractured relationships among key stakeholders that prevent a meaningful and necessary collaboration that can collectively address policy and practice concerns and lift up successes
- ❖ Outdated or absence of training curriculum for probation, court-service staff, and stakeholders

- ✦ Absence of routine booster training that includes coaching and mentoring to required skill proficiency and application
- ✦ Fragmented and/or inconsistent application of diversion practices (including absence of outcome data)
- ✦ Dysfunctional relationship with law enforcement and school administrations
- ✦ Absence of applied philosophy and operational practices at all key decision points that reduce disproportionality for youth of color, and missed opportunities to affect racial and ethnic disparities
- ✦ Inconsistent application of scientifically validated risk-need-responsivity (RNR) instruments at critical youth justice decision points
- ✦ Ineffective translation of RNR results for case planning and case management, matching results to level of supervision and targeted service/treatment interventions
- ✦ Absence of meaningful family engagement practices
- ✦ Underutilization of relevant and necessary information (risk level, targeted domain for service intervention, etc.) at detention, adjudication, and disposition decisions
- ✦ Excessive court processing timelines
- ✦ Absence of consistent expectations and practices in response to behavioral transgressions or “technical violations” while under court supervision
- ✦ Overreliance on court orders that prioritize compliance with conditions without research-based balance of treatment and positive supports
- ✦ Standard application of length of probation without provisions for early or successful closure when risk is ameliorated and service interventions reflect substantial progress or completion
- ✦ Limited service and program interventions and/or expedient access to effective resources that reduce risk and stabilize behavioral health or education challenges

Merely reading and contemplating this list of challenges confronting youth justice leaders and their workforce can be exhausting. Some participating jurisdictions could legitimately argue that nearly all twenty-two issues in the list existed to some degree at the beginning of their participation in the Mondoro Project. Indeed, the RFK National Resource Center’s experience in collaborating with more than 40 state or local jurisdictions to conduct the probation and juvenile justice system review confirms these are the most common challenges that negatively affect system performance and positive youth outcomes. In a classic understatement, this can be overwhelming. Nonetheless, as proved by the courageous leadership and workforce within the six participating jurisdictions these daunting challenges were identified uniquely

within each site, overcome, and according to their own accounts were well worth the effort to produce positive system change and improved youth outcomes.

The Mondoro Project provided the opportunity to commit to a comprehensive review of system practices and included key youth justice partners in the review and analysis. The Probation System Review Guidebook, 3rd Edition created the framework to ensure the application of proven methods and processes that would ultimately identify strengths upon which to build and prioritize areas of concern/challenge to collaboratively address through reform and innovation aligned with research-informed practices and results. The jurisdictions positioned themselves to produce, implement and manage change and progress aligned with their unique environmental and contextual factors. Additionally, in all six jurisdictions, the collaboration of system stakeholders improved their capacity to identify and address sequenced challenges and reforms. As a result, despite the formidable challenges and obstacles, each jurisdiction produced their impressive list of achievements. Their testimonials (*see Appendix B*) reinforce the worth of their investment of time, energy, and exemplary leadership on behalf of their youth and families.

Several fundamental elements of leading and driving successful, sustainable, and measurable reform emerged that undergird success:

1. Structural formation of a collaboration of youth justice stakeholders empowered and authorized to act and delegate activities and actions throughout the probation and juvenile justice review;
2. Collective creation of unifying mission, goals, objectives, and desired outcomes to drive the prioritized activities during the probation and juvenile justice system review;
3. Appointment of a Project Coordinator (see Appendix B for job description and responsibilities) to oversee and organize logistical components of the review process;
4. Commitment to methodologies that guarantee input to inform the review and analysis from all critical stakeholders and at all levels within their agency, organization, or community (e.g., policy and statutory examination, affinity group interviews, cross-discipline discussion groups, process mapping, etc.), to include youth and family voice;
5. Allocation of time to stakeholders for participation in subcommittees or ad-hoc working groups that ensure all elements of the review (management practices, probation supervision practice, inter-agency collaboration and work processes, and quality assurance and continuous quality improvement) are informed by local subject matter experience and expertise;

6. Comprehensive re-examination of the data systems and reports that inform system performance and youth outcome, answering the question whether sufficient workforce resources are allocated to collection, management and reporting of quantitative and qualitative data sufficient for system accountability consistent with mission and outcomes; and
7. Anticipation of the infrastructure necessary to effectively implement the prioritized reforms and innovations, this critical step, informed by research on Implementation Science and change management produces the capacity to sustain the innovations and enhancements, creating a legacy of system improvement that extends beyond the professional career of those driving the system transformation.

These elements align with research-informed and evidence-based approaches that produce positive system reforms and effective implementation and sustainability of these transformative operations and practices. The granular nature of many of the achievements documented in this brief also reflect singular policy and practice improvements and innovations that can be simultaneously produced within broader system transformation work (reinforcing the experience and results from the extensive previous history of system reviews facilitated by the RFK National Resource Center). The probation and youth justice system review guided and driven by the Probation System Review Guidebook, 3rd Edition encourages the dynamic application of innovation throughout the conduct of the actual review and analysis. The success achieved by

the Mondoro Project sites proved once again that building the infrastructure to undertake the process, managing and sequencing the innovation and reforms, and implementing and sustaining dynamic and localized probation, court, and community approaches and programs can – and did – occur simultaneously.

The RFK National Resource Center considered it a privilege to collaborate with each jurisdiction throughout the Dennis M. Mondoro Probation and Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Project. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) grant award (OJJDP FY 18 Second Chance Act Ensuring Public Safety and Improving Outcomes for Youth in Confinement and While under Community Supervision; Award # 2018-CZ-BX-K002) made this project possible. Our proven effective approach to facilitate, drive, inform, and support these jurisdictions through the framework detailed in the Probation System Review Guidebook, 3rd Edition organized the activities and methodologies that permitted local leadership to establish their priorities and co-create innovative solutions that align with research-informed practices. The processes through which these jurisdictions and their leadership designed and implemented these positive reforms can be replicated. Driven by our mission to rely upon credible research and data-informed evidence to improve and enhance system performance and youth outcomes, the RFK National Resource Center welcomes the chance to collaborate with your jurisdiction and produce similar transformative opportunities and results in your youth justice system.

“The future does not belong to those who are content with today. Rather it will belong to those who can blend vision, reason, and courage in a personal commitment.”

Robert F. Kennedy (1967)

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Lancaster County, Nebraska District Programs Coordinator Job Description (November 2022)

A. Duties:

Coordinator will work under close supervision of the Chief Probation Officer to coordinate juvenile justice transformation work within the district. The Coordinator will plan, coordinate, develop, train and facilitate initiatives and special programming within the district. The Coordinator will work closely with key stakeholders to include but not limited to the judges, attorneys, providers, law enforcement, Administrative Office of Courts and Probation (AOCP), and other youth and family serving agencies. The individual in this position will exercise initiative to facilitate and encourage ongoing progress toward identified goals and objectives, conduct ongoing review of outcomes, and create necessary district policy/protocol.

B. Description of Work:

Enhance policy, procedures and protocols within the district in accordance with state policy and protocols, state statute, state Supreme Court rules and nationally recognized best practices in working with youth and families.

Work with the AOCP to identify gaps within the existing system to draft and recommend policy enhancements, as well as innovative strategies to improve juvenile justice throughout the state.

Provide juvenile justice best practice guidance and technical assistance that incorporates implementation science best practices.

Provide guidance and support to the Leadership Team, district staff and stakeholders that encourages innovative, solution-focused problem solving to occur in order to address gaps/barriers within the system enhancement work.

Coordinate the juvenile justice initiatives within the district that includes the delegation of tasks such as scheduling meetings, assisting with notetaking and ensuring specific data and outcomes are available.

Establish methods for the data review and data analysis of initiatives within the district to monitor outcomes and progress toward identified goals.

Work closely with the Chief Deputy of Probation to provide oversight of the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process to ensure adherence to district initiatives, as well as the core components of evidence based practice (referred to as AC4E).

Conduct training and supportive coaching strategies for staff in order to enhance workforce development to include performance management and professional development.

Coordinate education and training to stakeholders on emerging juvenile justice topics.

Establish methods to highlight positive outcomes of the transformation work with youth/families within the district and create a system of organizational memory to guide future efforts.

Prepare and present written summary reports to share with the district, AOCP, judges, county commissioners and other local stakeholders.

Supervise, coach and mentor a team of staff within the district as outlined in the organizational structure, to include CQI reviews and observations, one-on-one meetings, live audits, completion of performance evaluations.

Probation System Review TESTIMONIALS (2022)

Paul Daniels, Director

Juvenile Court Services
King County Superior Court
Seattle, Washington

In late 2019, King County, Washington was incredibly fortunate to be awarded the opportunity to participate as one of three jurisdictions in a cohort of the Dennis M. Mondoro Probation and Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Project. Going into this engagement, we were familiar with the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, and were both anxious and excited about the opportunity to take a “long look in the mirror” with regard to our practices and our commitment to system reform. To call our local environment “complicated,” would be a significant understatement, but the RFK National Resource Center team has been steadfast, deeply engaged, and committed to supporting us with unique and highly qualified insights, relevant research, and the willingness to engage in the difficult conversations necessary to push real reform. The RFK team also brings to bear an incredible roster of technical assistance experts that provide keen insight and expertise that are essential in a reform environment. Taking on this initiative has been both daunting and rewarding, but absolutely necessary. While the work continues, we are already seeing the benefits and progress offered by such a focused effort to align our needs and priorities and, ultimately, create better outcomes for youth in King County. As they say, “Trust the process.”

William (Bill) Prince, JD, CCM

Greene County Family Court Administrator and
Chief Juvenile Officer
31st Judicial Circuit
Springfield, Missouri

The Dennis M. Mondoro Probation and Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Project through the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice was a truly transformative process for the Greene County (Missouri) Juvenile Office. Fundamentally, we learned that even the best-intentioned change will wither and die on the vine unless that change occurs within a healthy and effective organizational structure. In working with our RFK consultants, it was determined very early on that our organizational structure was actually getting in the way of providing best practice, evidence-based and trauma informed services. To ameliorate that issue, the Greene County Juvenile Office engaged in a transformative office-wide reorganization. Working with the RFK consultants, leadership was provided with coaching and support necessary to help our leadership team remain courageous in making these difficult changes and remaining committed to this endeavor. When all was said and done, we now have an organization that has better span of control, better communication and better change management techniques, all of which will aid in better serving our youth and families.

Robert A. Bermingham, Jr.

Court Service Unit Director (retired November 2021)
Fairfax County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court
Fairfax County, Virginia

In 2019, Fairfax County, Virginia was selected to participate in the first cohort of jurisdictions to partner with the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice to conduct the activities of the Dennis M. Mondoro Probation and Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Project.

A critical achievement key to our system transformation process was creating a transformation team comprised of system stakeholders and facilitated by the Chief Judge. While each of our system stakeholders has a different role in administering justice, we learned that our goals are not mutually exclusive and that we could achieve more working together.

The CSU adopted validated assessment instruments at key decision-making points throughout our system. Although the YASI was used before the RFK National Resource Center's Probation System Review process, it was not administered with fidelity or consistently applied to inform decision-making. A notable achievement was the creation of an assessment unit and movement away from adjudicating and disposing of cases in a single hearing.

By combining the increased use of diversion and assessment instruments to inform disposition recommendations in Court, the CSU has reduced the number of low-risk youth entering the justice system and ordered on probation. The CSU has enhanced efforts to engage critical stakeholders by offering training on juvenile justice transformation.

Data collection, quality assurance reviews, ongoing CQI, and coaching are now embedded in training when rolling out new initiatives. Building off lessons learned from past implementation efforts we embedded data collection, QA/CQI activities, booster trainings, and coaching and feedback from the beginning.

Kari Rumbaugh

Assistant Deputy Administrator
Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation
Juvenile Services Division

The Probation System Review was an opportunity that Nebraska immediately knew would benefit Probation. The intensive review process was supported by the Chief Justice, State Court and Probation Administrators and local probation management. This project was made possible due to a strong relationship with John Tuell and the impact that the probation system reviews have had in other states. We selected Lancaster County ...because they have had strong judicial leadership. Nebraska is a statewide probation system within the Judicial Branch so therefore in addition to learning specifically how Lancaster County could enhance probation; we were also focused on statewide impacts for probation youth.

As the site visits continued throughout the review the impact of having John Tuell and the RFK Consultant Team lead the review was clear. They created an environment where all voices mattered and were heard, from judiciary to probation officers in the field. Their juvenile justice expertise led the group to identifying gaps and determine what is best for youth. During the implementation phase, the 15 recommendations from the Probation System Review were prioritized and the Lancaster County collaboration began work on shared focused priorities. The review ensured open communication, recommendations focused on probation specifically and feedback from experts with years of experience and knowledge to help move the recommendations into real action. Nebraska wants to thank the RFK National Resource Center Team for their dedication to juvenile justice youth and families and leadership in helping states make true change to affect the lives of youth and families we work with every day.

dignity
equality
respect
individuality
safety
performance
potential
courage
purpose
community
leadership
hope
responsibility
accountability

The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, a program of RFK Community Alliance, provides consultation, technical assistance, and training to serve local, state, and national leaders, practitioners, and youth-serving agencies to enhance system performance and improve outcomes for children involved with the youth justice system.

To learn more, please visit: www.rfknrcjj.org.



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