

CHAPTER 3

Meeting the Needs of Youth in Juvenile Corrections

This Chapter describes the *Guideposts for Success for Transition Age Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System (Juvenile Justice Guideposts)*. The Guidepost is a framework to assist the multiple organizations that need to be involved to meet the needs and improve the transition outcomes of youth involved with the juvenile corrections system and to create the necessary community webs of support.

The *Juvenile Justice Guideposts* highlight specific experiences, supports, and services that are relevant to improving transition outcomes for youth with and without disabilities involved or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system within the framework of the *Guideposts for Success*. An increased understanding of the unique needs of this particular population of young people, combined with an enhanced level of coordination among the court and corrections systems, education, workforce, child welfare systems, and mental health systems can help decrease recidivism and increase the likelihood that these youth will become productive adult members of our society. This coordination is also a necessary precursor for the leveraging

(“blending” or “braiding”) of resources among these partners.

The Guideposts for Success

Built on 30 years of research and experience, NCWD/Youth and ODEP created the *Guideposts for Success*, a comprehensive framework that identifies what all youth, including youth with disabilities, need to succeed during the critical transition years. An extensive literature review of research, demonstration projects, and effective practices covering a wide range of programs and services — including lessons from youth development, quality education, workforce development, and the child welfare system — revealed five core commonalities across disciplines, programs, and institutional settings. The review pointed out that all youth, particularly at-risk youth (e.g., youth with mental health needs, other youth with disabilities), achieve better outcomes when they have access to:

- school-based preparatory experiences;
- career-preparation and work-based experiences;



The Guidepost is a framework to assist the multiple organizations that need to be involved to meet the needs and improve the transition outcomes of youth involved with the juvenile corrections system and to create the necessary community webs of support.

- youth development and leadership opportunities;
- connecting activities (support and community services);
- family involvement and supports.

This Guide focuses on application of the *Guideposts for Success* in the context of meeting the needs of transition-aged youth with and without disabilities who have been involved in the juvenile justice system. Regardless of the presence of a disability, these youth face many difficulties inherent in involvement in the juvenile justice system. For example, their ability to transition successfully may be hampered by (a) having been separated from their family while in a secure care facility, (b) stigma associated with having been detained when they re-enter their community, and (c) a lack of appropriate supports prior to, during, and after they are released.

There is widespread support for the idea that effective reintegration of youth from juvenile corrections to the community, school, and/or workforce requires highly individualized education, treatment, and transition planning from the moment the youth is committed, as well as regular committee review of these plans.¹⁰⁸ Key preparations are needed for a successful transition from juvenile corrections to the community, school, and workforce, including:

- providing rigorous standards-based instruction to support youth obtaining a high school diploma, vocational certificate, or GED;
- providing the information necessary to prepare youth for a career and to participate in supervised work experience;
- preparing the young person to meet upcoming challenges via activities and experiences which help them gain personal development skills and competencies;
- connecting the young person to programs, services, activities, and supports that will eventually help them gain access to chosen post-release and post-school options; and,
- maintaining parental and/or caretaker involvement in the youth's life, education, and training.

The *Juvenile Justice Guideposts* provides a roadmap for guiding this effort. By utilizing a strength-based approach to address the specific developmental needs of this population, caring adults (e.g., policymakers, program administrators, judges, court personnel, secure care staff, corrections professionals, youth service practitioners, parents, family members) can substantially increase the likelihood that former youth offenders will ultimately become productive contributing members of society. Although this framework for success has not yet been implemented in any known community in its entirety, key components are emerging in an array of communities around the country.

Guidepost 1 — School-Based Preparatory Experiences

At every stage in the juvenile justice process, youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in content standards, with clear performance expectations and graduation options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. To achieve this, secure care facilities must have a sufficient

number of highly qualified general and special education teachers who are compensated at the same level as teachers in local public schools. The professionals should also share an understanding of state assessments, and of effective instructional approaches needed to provide students with disabilities the meaningful opportunities to benefit from access to the general education curriculum. Collaboration with the local school district and state department of education is also necessary to ensure that the curriculum, materials, and instruction align with local and state standards and assessments. Moreover, Carnegie units earned by students should be transferable to public schools. Holding juvenile correctional schools accountable for providing a free and appropriate public education and meeting the adequate yearly progress standards of the No Child Left Behind Act are also important components for achieving educational success.

To assist youth in secure care, input is also necessary from security professionals. This cooperation will allow youth who are confined, including those with disabilities, to continue to pursue their education. For example, collaboratively developed facility-wide behavioral plans should be implemented to facilitate educational success; particular consideration should be given to whether behaviors reflect a manifestation of youth disability.

For those youth that are involved with juvenile justice, but not in secure care, collaboration and planning among caring adults (e.g., judges, teachers, administrators, parents, social service agencies, attorneys, police, mental health professionals) can help to ensure that student emotional and behavioral needs are met. Officers of the court are responsible for monitoring the status of the youth and ensuring compliance with court-ordered mandates, including participation in education and vocational training.

Guidepost 2 — Career Preparation and Work-Based Experiences

In order for youth to form and develop aspirations and make informed choices about careers, they must be afforded multiple opportunities to engage in

career preparation and work-based learning experiences. Participation in comprehensive vocational programming can serve as an approach to prevention and diversion from the juvenile justice system as well as a positive youth development strategy in the event that a youth is placed in a secure facility. There is evidence that, particularly for youth with ED or LD, school-based vocational education contributes to higher rates of post-school vocational training and employment.¹⁰⁹

Development and implementation of an appropriate career and technical education program within a juvenile correctional facility requires consideration of educational, vocational, and security issues. Collaboration is therefore key to providing a safe program that promotes meaningful vocational training and experiences that prepare youth with the types of skills they will need when they re-enter the community.

Career preparation and work-based experiences can be provided during the school day or after school, and may take place both on and off facility grounds through collaborations between corrections professionals, local community organizations, educators, and employers. Important strategies to having the youth successfully re-engage in his/her education include access to a graduated release program that allows the youth to leave the facility during the day and begin to transition back to school on a part-time basis, and ensuring the availability of tutorial services and enrichment programs. In the event that a partial release is not possible, technology can be used to facilitate virtual career exploration and simulation of the work environment can be used to teach job skills.

Broadly speaking, career and technical education programs must be comprehensive, and aligned with local school, local education agency, and state education policies, as well as community needs. In addition, programs should provide for assessment of student learning, as well as formalized progress toward a certificate or license in a field of study. Moreover, career and technical education programs should allow for the development of career pathways

that include course work, work experience, and post-secondary and career options. Any career and technical education provided should include skill training in an applied setting. Skills that may affect employability such as anger management, accepting feedback and following directions, should be a focus of youth training and experience. In addition, an advocate/job development specialist can assist in making the youth more employable and provide or assist the youth in obtaining needed training about accessing resources after release. Youth should also be provided guidance to address such issues as:

- how to respond to employers about previous involvement with juvenile justice;
- how to get juvenile records sealed and expunged; and,
- how to get such items as a social security card, financial assistance (e.g., health care, housing assistance, food assistance).

Collaboration between mental health services, juvenile correctional school professionals, youth service practitioners, and secure care staff will provide opportunities for youth to learn work-related skills (e.g., problem solving, social skills). In addition, youth should be provided opportunities to apply skills to activities in the living units, school at the facility, and supervised work experiences. Coordination among professionals is a key component of promoting generalization of skills.¹¹⁰

Guidepost 3 — Youth Development and Leadership

Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences. However, youth development may be complicated by adolescent risk behavior that is characterized by short-sighted decision making, poor impulse control, and vulnerability to peer pressure.¹¹¹ Adolescents may make immature judgments and decisions that are inadvertently harmful to themselves or others.¹¹² Concerns with decision making are even more

pronounced for youth involved in the juvenile justice and particularly, youth with disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system.

To promote both youth development and leadership, several approaches are beneficial as both prevention of law violating behavior and to promote successful reintegration into school, community, and the workforce. Specifically, youth would benefit from education related to common risk-taking behaviors (e.g., drug use, sexual activity, and law violations) and their consequences. Youth development and leadership may also be promoted via specific instruction and involvement in activities that promote self-empowerment. For example, as an alternative to incarceration, involvement with community service activities and Teen Court (see Chapter 4) may provide a positive intervention.

Youth development and leadership competencies may also be fostered through (a) collaboration between the juvenile justice system and the workforce development youth services system;¹¹³ (b) peer and adult mentoring activities; and, (c) appropriate transition services that promote reengagement into the community, school, and/or workforce. Although some logistical issues remain (e.g., sharing information, differences in goals), instances do exist in which community organizations, workforce development staff, and community members are collaborating and such collaboration shows promise for positively affecting outcomes for youth transitioning from juvenile corrections.¹¹⁴ For example, in Louisiana, “(t)he workforce board hired a probation official to serve as the project’s juvenile justice coordinator.”¹¹⁵ The action contributed to noteworthy improvements in collaborative efforts.

Positive adult-youth and peer-to-peer mentoring activities may assist in establishing important relationships. The responsiveness of adolescents to peers is a factor that supports the use of peer mentors.¹¹⁶ Older youth who have transitioned from the juvenile justice system and made positive changes may be particularly positive role models for youth. Adult role models may also promote positive

youth development. For example, in Arkansas, local employers provided mentoring support to youth in the workplace.¹¹⁷ This example of adult mentoring also highlights the importance of connecting youth to community supports that may promote development of workforce skills. Exposure to role models in a variety of other contexts, such as instruction, training, and activities that promote self-advocacy and conflict resolution may also be effective.

Another key component of youth development concerns the availability of support for youth to effectively transition out of juvenile corrections. A transition support model should include both broad based supports for all youth, as well as highly individualized plans that are developed with meaningful youth input. Particularly for youth with disabilities in a juvenile correctional placement, transition services should include self-determination skills, competitive job placement, flexible educational opportunities, social skills instruction, and immediate service coordination of wrap-around services. An example of a research-based approach to transition that includes comprehensive and ongoing support services is Project Parole SUPPORT (Service Utilization Promoting Positive Outcomes in Rehabilitation and Transition for Incarcerated Adolescents with Disabilities) (see Chapter 4).

Guidepost 4 — Connecting Activities

In addition to ongoing collaboration to prepare youth with and without disabilities for transition while they are committed, collaborative services are also crucial after youth exit.¹¹⁸ However, this collaboration between mental health, education, youth development, parole offenders, and families requires a clear delineation of roles and ongoing communication between organizations and individuals. The collaboration is crucial, given that the educational, social, developmental, and mental health challenges that youth faced throughout their involvement with the juvenile justice system typically continue upon exit. Youth with ED are a particularly vulnerable population during transition. However, support from a number of professionals can have a

significant impact on recidivism, as well as youth participation in school and/or work upon exit.

For example, formerly confined youth who received mental health services in the six months after exiting juvenile corrections were more than twice as likely to be engaged in work or school at that point in time and 12 months after release.¹¹⁹ Being engaged in work or school in the community after one year is particularly important, given that the likelihood of return greatly diminishes if youth haven't been confined again within the first year of release.¹²⁰

On a practical level, youth with disabilities exiting juvenile corrections need assistance to overcome specific obstacles. For example, youth should have the opportunity to return to their home public school, if appropriate. Concerned adults can assist youth on a personal level, but systemic changes can also be made to explicitly promote a youth's return to their home school or other school placement. For example, in Virginia, a comprehensive plan exists to assist youth in the transition from juvenile corrections to public schools and includes a reenrollment plan, reenrollment team and coordinator, procedures for sharing academic and behavioral information, a timeline by which specific procedures are to be completed, and support upon reenrollment (e.g., counseling).¹²¹ To facilitate the transition, it is important that juvenile corrections and public schools collaborate to develop an exit document that the public schools understand and accept as a valid summary of student progress.

There is also a great need for young people to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options.

Guidepost Five — Family Involvement and Supports

Parents are a vital component of any plan to positively affecting youth trajectory toward independence and self-sufficiency. Significant benefits are evident when parents are involved throughout youth involvement with the juvenile

justice system, as well following youth exit from a juvenile correctional facility.¹²² At the initial stages of youth involvement with the juvenile correctional system, parents can provide important information on their child.¹²³ In addition, input from parents will assist in appropriate placement in diversionary programs and student success in the programs. Support is particularly important for youth with disabilities in juvenile corrections, in light of their common issues with emotional problems, drug abuse, and making the transition from confinement to school, community, and workforce. For example, multisystemic therapy relies on interviews with family members to identify problem behaviors and possible causes, as well as youth strengths and the supports available to the youth at home, school, in the community.¹²⁴

Parent involvement is also essential for successful interventions that may be implemented at any stage in the juvenile justice process. Specifically, youth benefit from family-based cognitive-behavior interventions and drug treatment that involves parents on an ongoing basis.¹²⁵ Similarly, familial involvement during youth confinement and upon exit is an important factor for reducing recidivism rates.¹²⁶ However, the complexities of the juvenile justice system and the trauma of youth involvement with this system can be overwhelming to parents. As such, ongoing support is needed to ensure parents are well-informed and can appropriately advocate for their child.

Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

| GENERAL NEEDS | SPECIFIC NEEDS |
|--|---|
| <p>School-Based Preparatory Experiences</p> <p>1</p> | <p>In order to perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. These should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic programs that are based on clear state standards; • career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards; • curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work, and community-based learning experiences; • learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary; • supports from and by highly qualified staff; • access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures; and, • graduation standards that include options. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and use strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling; • have access to specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school; • develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and, • be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff. |

Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

| GENERAL NEEDS | SPECIFIC NEEDS |
|--|---|
| <p>School-Based Preparatory Experiences (contd.)</p> | <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • availability of quality educational, vocational, and GED programs; • access to additional academic and behavioral support that relies on research-based techniques; • teachers, administrators, and secure care professionals in juvenile correctional facilities that collaborate to promote youth access to a free and appropriate public education; • conditions in juvenile correctional facilities, and throughout the juvenile justice process that foster enrollment in education, alternative education, special education, vocational, pre-GED and GED programs, and post-secondary education based on youth needs and not on available programs; • placement in housing units and classrooms that take into consideration youth academic and behavioral needs, as well as placement of youth in classes with similar aged youth; • opportunity for youth to earn Carnegie units that transfer to public middle and high schools; • teachers who use content enhancements, strategy instruction, and contextualized learning opportunities to provide access to the general education curriculum; • juvenile correctional schools that are held accountable for providing a free and appropriate public education, meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards, and have a sufficient number of general and special education teachers who are also highly qualified and compensated at the same level as teachers in the local public schools; • educational settings that include universal, secondary, and tertiary proactive approaches to promoting positive student behavior, as well as counseling services and social skills training; • collaboration and planning among teachers, secure care staff, and mental health professionals to ensure that students’ emotional and behavioral needs are met and that appropriate strategies are used when addressing behaviors that are a manifestation of a student’s disability; and, • collaboration among general and special educators within the correctional facility, and with public schools concerning the youth’s education, behavior, and transition plan implementation. |
| <p>Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning Experiences</p> <p>2</p> | <p>Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day or through after-school programs and will require collaboration with other organizations. All youth need information on career options, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • career assessments to help identify students’ school and post-school preferences and interests; • structured exposure to postsecondary education and other life-long learning opportunities; • exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation; and, • training designed to improve job-seeking skills and workplace basic skills (sometimes called “soft skills”). |

Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

| GENERAL NEEDS | SPECIFIC NEEDS |
|---|---|
| <p>Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning Experiences (contd.)</p> | <p>In order to identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing; • multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that is specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit; • opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (“soft skills”); and, • opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the relationship between planning and career choices and the benefits of planning; • learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs; and, • learn to find, formally request and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training and employment settings. <hr/> <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need additional supports and services such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in comprehensive vocational programming that is consistent with the youth’s aptitude and interest and with high growth industries in the community to which they will return, as an approach to prevention and diversion from the juvenile justice system; • vocational education should include scope and sequence for a variety of courses and how they will be adapted to meet the unique needs of the setting and students. Scope and sequence provide a guide for both what students should learn and the order in which concepts should be presented; • vocational education should include formal assessment of both student learning and progress toward certification or license requirements in the vocation of study; • development of career pathways that include a list of courses, work experiences, post-secondary options, and career options; • access to employment and work-based experiences on and off facility grounds by collaborating with the community and businesses; • an advocate/job development specialist who can assist in making the youth more employable and provide or assist the youth in obtaining needed training about accessing resources after release, getting records sealed and expunged, and responding to employers’ questions about their previous law violations; • training in behavioral skills that may affect sustaining employment (e.g., anger management, accepting feedback, accepting directions); • access to a graduated release program that allows the youth to leave the facility during the day to complete supervised work experience; and, • access to technology to assist in career exploration and job simulation when partial release to work is not a possibility. |

Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

| GENERAL NEEDS | SPECIFIC NEEDS |
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| <p>Youth Development & Leadership</p> <p>3</p> | <p>Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings; • peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities; • exposure to role models in a variety of contexts; • training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution; • exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service; and, • opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem. <p>Youth with disabilities also need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentors and role models including persons with and without disabilities; • an understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need additional supports and services including transitional services to assist with reintegration into school, community, and the workforce, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement in service other than community service (e.g., youth court) for youth who are diverted from the juvenile justice system; • a highly individualized transition plan that begins upon entry to a juvenile correctional facility and is developed with meaningful youth input; • the availability of a transition support model that considers the unique needs of youth involved in juvenile corrections and includes self-determination skills, competitive job placement, flexible educational opportunities, social skills instruction, and immediate service coordination of wrap-around services; • clear instruction concerning relevant laws, rights, and consequences throughout the juvenile justice process; • additional emphasis on self-empowerment through training in self-advocacy, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-determination, and self-sufficiency; • an understanding of risk-taking behaviors (and the relationship to their disabilities) and their consequences, such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, recidivism; and, • formal and informal connections to significant adult role models, peer mentors, and older youth who have transitioned from the juvenile justice system. |

Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

| GENERAL NEEDS | SPECIFIC NEEDS |
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| <p>Connecting Activities</p> <p>4</p> | <p>Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. All youth may need one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mental and physical health services; • transportation; • tutoring; • financial planning and management; • post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies; and, • connection to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation, sports, faith-based organizations). <p>In addition, youth with disabilities may need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies; • community orientation and mobility training (e.g. accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics); • exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies; • personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and, • benefits planning counseling including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that they may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate prevention services that include access to mental health and drug abuse treatment; • access to diversion programs, when appropriate, such as teen court and other community-based options; • advocates at each stage of the juvenile justice process to ensure that youth understand the processes; • support from individuals, programs and systems (e.g. mental health, education, vocational rehabilitation, social services) while confined and for at least one year after release; • alcohol and drug abuse treatment that extends for a minimum of one year post-release and includes family involvement, training in life skills and abstinence, and after care (e.g., self-help, support groups); • probation and parole officers that have time, knowledge, and resources to assist youth; • access to transition specialists who can collaborate with relevant professionals across systems (e.g., parole, mental health, child welfare, vocational rehabilitation); • ongoing contact with and visits from public school and job development/placement professionals to maintain contact and support for re-entry; and, • a transitional exit program from the juvenile correctional facility (including day passes) that provides progressively increased involvement with public school and/or job placement. |

Table 1

Guideposts for Success for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Corrections System

| GENERAL NEEDS | SPECIFIC NEEDS |
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| <p>Family Involvement & Supports</p> <p>5</p> | <p>Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promote the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have high expectations that build upon the young person’s strengths, interests, and needs, and fosters their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency; • remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood; • have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources; • take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and, • have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks. <p>In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families, and other caring adults who have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an understanding of their youth’s disability and how it affects his or her education, employment, and/or daily living options; • knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation; • knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and, • an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives. <p>Youth with and without disabilities involved in the juvenile justice system need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents who are well-informed and can assist and advocate for them; • facilities and programs that are committed to engaging parents and families in prevention and rehabilitative services; • specific, ongoing opportunities for parent, family, and caring adult involvement, participation, and input at each stage in the juvenile justice process; • family and community involvement as delineated in Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST); and, • family-focused mental health treatment that also includes individual youth therapy, as well as behavioral and/or cognitive/behavioral interventions. |