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Services for Youth After Leaving Programs Key to the Acclaimed Missouri Model*Missouri Offers Important Lessons for Improving Public Safety in Maryland***Executive Summary**

Missouri's nationally recognized approach to treating delinquent youth extends beyond treatment in facilities and includes a strong aftercare system. There is a seamless continuation of rehabilitative treatment in the community. For Maryland to achieve the same success as Missouri, aftercare will need to be a key component, including good transition planning, strong case management and comprehensive and individualized services in the community.

Introduction

Missouri has a nationally recognized model for treating delinquent youth who require out-of-home placement. Missouri has very low recidivism rates.

Much of the spotlight is on the smaller size and regional location of the facilities and the rehabilitative programming that takes place in those facilities.

Research strongly suggests that the services provided to a youth *after* placement can have a significant impact on recidivism. The aftercare process specifically refers to the period of time after the youth's release from residential custody, while the youth remains under the supervision of the state agency and the juvenile court. With proper planning, the aftercare process is intended to be a seamless transition period where youth, with the guidance and supervision of a case manager, move from facilities into community-based treatment and therapy with gradual reduction in these services

This issue brief examines the nature of aftercare in Missouri and discusses implications for Maryland, which seeks to replicate the Missouri model.

Methodology

Through interviews and review of program documents, Advocates for Children and Youth examined the aftercare process in Missouri as a function of its overall juvenile treatment model.

Findings*Case Managers*

Missouri's Division of Youth Services employs a graduated aftercare system that helps to ensure youth exiting residential programs receive the services and support needed to transition successfully from a facility back into her/his community.¹ Aftercare is typically a period ranging from 4 to 6 months.

Prior to release from residential facilities, the youth's case manager, also known as a service coordinator, meets with the youth's family and facility staff to formulate an aftercare plan.

Typically, the aftercare plan is a continuation of the youth's existing individual treatment plan, with the services shifting from the facility into the community.² Before release, youth usually receive treatment furloughs where they are allowed to return home for one or more overnight visits prior to their release. This allows the service coordinator to plan for any unforeseen barriers to the youth's successful reentry.

Once youth are released from custody, the case manager's supervision is increased to ensure the youth are transitioning properly from the residential facility back into the community. Generally, case managers meet with youth on a weekly basis. However, the frequency of contact is dependent on the needs of the youth as well as the youth's initial ability to transition back into the community. Factors that may influence this transition and frequency of contact include school attendance, employment or lack thereof, and counseling needs.

Case managers in Missouri have the opportunity to develop and maintain close relationships due in large part to intentionally small caseloads of 15 to 20 youth per case manager.

¹ Interviews with Dennis M. Gragg, Assistant Deputy Director, Missouri Division of Youth Services (May 19, 24 and 27, 2010).

² The Individual Treatment Plan (ITP) is the master plan that outlines and defines the course of treatment for the youth. It is a comprehensive and holistic plan that delineates the goals, objectives, resources and key people in the treatment process.

Services

The size and scope of all aftercare services depends on the individual treatment plan that the youth receives while in the facility. The Missouri approach recognizes the various needs that each youth may be faced with when returning to their respective communities and creates supports and services that are individually tailored. Services for youth in aftercare may include any combination of the following:

- Counseling for the youth and family
- Intensive case supervision
- Job placement assistance
- Assistance in educational enrollment
- Mentoring services
- Alternative living arrangements
- Community service

Case managers expect youth to be “productively engaged” in a program of education, work or a combination of the two upon release from residential placement.³ In addition to supervising and ensuring youth meet program requirements, case managers also actively seek to get youth positively involved in their community through volunteer opportunities and community-based program participation.

Missouri’s aftercare philosophy is to provide youth with supervision in a community setting and assist them in functioning positively in that setting because by incorporating positive recreational activities in the community, youth are less likely to fill time with actions and activities that lead to negative consequences.

In addition to the supervision and support from case managers, Missouri also operates 11 non-residential “day treatment” centers. These centers service one-stop step-downs for many teens leaving Missouri facilities.⁴ Day treatment centers offer programs in GED training, traditional academic courses, social and emotional treatment interventions, substance abuse counseling, and career planning and skill-building. Within the day treatment center, case managers, day treatment teachers and other staff continue to work with the youth and families to

complete the youth’s individual education or treatment plans.

In Missouri, day treatment centers serve two roles: as alternatives to detention for low-risk youth and as reintegration tools for youth who have successfully completed residential treatment. The center helps to bridge gaps in services for youth who have committed more serious offenses that require additional supervision, who are unable to attend public school after release, and who require an alternative educational setting.

Conclusion and Discussion

Despite the greater attention to Missouri’s juvenile facilities, a key component of this successful model is aftercare that provides seamless transitions between treatment in the facility and treatment back in the community.

There are important implications for Maryland.

First, youth need to be placed close enough to their families to enable effective transitions. In Missouri, families are involved in the transition planning, and youth return home for trial visits. This is much more difficult if youth are located far away from home, including in distant places within Maryland.

Second, aftercare standards are needed that incorporate all of the key elements, to establish the after expectations for each youth. Implementation of these standards can be monitored and measured.

Third, caseworkers need to have a small enough caseload to enable to work closely with the youth and families before release and afterwards.

Finally, a comprehensive array of services in the community is needed to continue the services provided in the facility.

The bottom line is rehabilitating delinquent youth and public safety requires good programming within facilities *and* strong aftercare. One without the other is not likely to succeed.

Maryland is taking important steps to improve its residential programming, with the help of experts from Missouri. It is also working to enhance its aftercare. Both strategies will prove critical.

³ Missouri Division of Youth Services, “Youth Treatment Programs” (program description).

⁴See Dick Mendel, Annie E. Casey Foundation “Small is Beautiful: The Missouri Division of Youth Services,” Juvenile Justice at a Crossroads (2003).