

# Cook County Juvenile Probation and Court Services Court Notification Program



## **Manual for Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiatives Delegation Site Visitors**

# COOK COUNTY JUVENILE PROBATION COURT NOTIFICATION PROGRAM

## **Purpose:**

The purpose of the Juvenile Probation Court Notification Program is to decrease the number of minors who fail to appear to court. This purpose is achieved through reminder notifications being mailed to the minor and a reminder telephone call being placed the day before the minor's court date. Ultimately, with fewer minors failing to appear for court, the number of minors being detained for failure to appear warrants will decrease.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the philosophy of the Court Notification Program is to expedite cases through the court system with increased attendance resulting in fewer minors being detained.

## **Case Processing Background<sup>2</sup>:**

In Cook County when a minor's case is referred to Juvenile Court the arresting police officer will contact the Probation Department's Detention Screening who administers a risk assessment instrument (RAI) (see Exhibit \_\_\_\_). Minors who score below a twenty on the RAI are given a 21 day out of custody date to appear in Juvenile Court.<sup>3</sup> The arresting agency forwards a copy of the arrest report to the Probation Department's Screening Division for all minors given a 21 day date to appear. At this stage, the cases are referred to in the Court Notification Program as pre-arraignment cases.

When the minor and his/her family appear in Juvenile Court 21 days later, one of four possible dispositional outcomes can occur: a case can be (1) screened out (2) court diverted (3) given a status date or (4) a juvenile petition is filed. The Assistant States Attorney's Office (ASA) makes this legal decision. If a case is screened out no further action will occur. A minor's case can be diverted if referred by the ASA and if the minor participates in a diversion program monitored by the Probation Department. If the ASA has not made a legal decision by the time the minor is scheduled for their first court date or if the case was diverted and the minor failed to appear, the case is continued for 21 days for a status date. Lastly, the ASA can file a juvenile petition and he/she will be arraigned on that day. There is one courtroom designated to hear all arraignment cases. If there is a finding of probable cause the case is continued for approximately two – three weeks for a status date in the geographical calendar where the minor resides.<sup>4</sup> After appearing for arraignment, the cases are referred to in the Court Notification Program as post-arraignment cases.

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<sup>1</sup> In Cook County there are two categories of warrants that a Judge can issue. A category one warrant where there is a mandatory hold in custody once the warrant is executed and a category two warrant where the minor can be released either home or to a detention alternative program upon execution of the warrant.

<sup>2</sup> For Cook County Juvenile Court's case processing flow chart refer to Exhibit \_\_\_\_

<sup>3</sup> Minors who score a twenty-one or above are held in the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and given a court date for the following business day.

<sup>4</sup> The Juvenile Court has thirteen (13) delinquency courtrooms that are called calendars. Each calendar hears cases from a geographical location in Cook County.

## **Target Population:**

The Court Notification Program targets minors at two distinct stages in the legal process: (1) pre-adjudication minors and (2) post-adjudication minors.

## **Program Activities:**

### **1. Pre-arraignment cases**

The Court Notification Program uses two methods to remind minors of their mandatory notice to appear in Juvenile Court 21 days after their arrest: (1) mailing a reminder notification to the minor's address and (2) calling the minor the business day before his/her scheduled appearance. The Court Notification Program obtains the minor's demographic information from the police report that is forwarded at the time of arrest.

### **2. Post-arraignment cases**

As previously mentioned, once a minor is arraigned and there is a finding of probable cause the case is continued for two-three weeks for a status date in the geographical calendar where the minor resides. Every day the arraignment court gives a list to the Probation Department of all minors who were arraigned on that particular day. The list includes the minor's demographic information and information about the minor's next court date.

The Court Notification Program uses two methods to remind post-arraignment minors of their next court date in their geographical calendar: (1) mailing a reminder notification to the minor's address and (2) calling the minor the business day before his/her scheduled appearance. The Court Notification Program obtains the minor's demographic information from the information received from the arraignment court.

## **Utilization:**

The Court Notification Program does not have a service capacity. The support staff are responsible for processing all pre-arraignment and post-arraignment cases. Therefore, the program is not underutilized.

## **Cultural Competency and Racial Disparity Impact:**

No racial disparity exists in the enrollment of minor's into the Court Notification Program; however, racial disparity may exist in the targeted outcomes of the program. Because all pre-arraignment and post-arraignment minors benefit from the services of the Court Notification Program, there is no racial disparity in the enrollment into the Program. However, if the goal of the program is to notify all pre and post-arraignment minors of court dates in order to decrease failure to appear rates that impacts the rate of detention, possible racial disparity can potentially exist in the outcomes. For example, racial disparity may exist when analyzing who actually receives the mailed notification and who actually receives a reminder telephone call. Families living in poverty may be more transient and/or may not have a telephone to receive reminder calls. Therefore, if the family moved and did not forward their mail they will not receive the mailed reminder notification. Likewise, if the family does not have a telephone they will not receive a reminder telephone call. Given that statistically a high percentage of poverty stricken families are minority, a racial disparity may exist when looking at who actually benefits from the Court Notification Program. One goal for the Department is to begin tracking the mailed

notifications returned to the Department, as well as those families that cannot benefit from the telephone reminder as it relates to race.

## **Outcomes:**

### **1. Youth – Based Outcomes:**

The desired outcome for all youth benefiting from the Court Notification Program is to have participants appear for their scheduled court date. The Department is incrementally establishing protocols in 2006 to track successful and unsuccessful completion rates.

### **2. System – Focused Outcomes:**

As a result of the Court Notification Program there is effective interaction with Juvenile Court entities and other criminal justice authorities. For instance, collaboration between arresting agencies, the Juvenile Probation Department, the Assistant State’s Attorney’s Office (ASA) and the actual courtrooms themselves is essential. Police departments are responsible for forwarding arrest reports with demographic information to the probation department in order for support staff to mail notification letters and make reminder telephone calls to minors. The ASA is responsible for communicating with the Juvenile Probation Department the legal decision made regarding case processing in order for Probation to either provide diversion services or inform the minor and family of which court to appear in if a petition was filed. After arraignment and a finding of probable cause, the courtroom is responsible for forwarding information to support staff to mail reminder notifications and make telephone calls for post-arraignment cases. Therefore, system-wide collaboration has resulted from the implementation of the Court Notification Program.

The Department is incrementally establishing protocols in 2006 to track the following system-focused outcomes as it relates to the Court Notification Program:

- Reduction in numbers of youth detained
- Reduction in the disproportionate detention of youth of color

## **Administration:**

### **1. Pre-arraignment cases**

The Juvenile Probation Department, who administers the Court Notification Program, did not require hiring of additional staff in order to effectuate the goals of the program. The Department re-engineered six support staff’s responsibilities in order to implement the program for pre-arraignment cases. These support staff are responsible for completing the pre-arraignment notification post cards and mailing them to each minor as a reminder of their mandatory date to appear in Juvenile Court.<sup>5</sup> The average amount of pre-arraignment post card notifications completed by six support staff on a daily basis is 58.<sup>6</sup> The support staff supervisor is responsible for calculating the monthly “Tally Sheet for Court Notifications” (see Exhibit \_\_\_\_\_). Support staff furthermore contacts each pre-arraignment minor the day before he/she is scheduled to appear in Juvenile Court.

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<sup>5</sup> See attached pre-arraignment reminder post card, Exhibit \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>6</sup> Average calculated from average daily notices reported from October, 2004 through October, 2005.

## **2. Post-arraignment cases**

In order to administer the Court Notification Program, the Juvenile Probation Department did not have to hire additional staff to implement the program for post-arraignment cases. The Department re-engineered four additional support staff's responsibilities in order to implement the program for post-arraignment cases. These support staff are responsible for completing the post-arraignment notification post cards and mailing them to each minor as a reminder of their mandatory court date.<sup>7</sup> The average amount of post-arraignment post card notifications completed by four support staff on a daily basis is 64.<sup>8</sup> The support staff furthermore contacts each post-arraignment minor the day before he/she is scheduled to appear for court.

## **Systems Relations:**

As previously mentioned, the Court Notification Program has fostered collaboration between juvenile justice entities and established credibility for the programs efficacy.

## **Conclusion:**

The Court Notification Program has the ability to reduce the unnecessary detention of minors who would otherwise be detained. Through the program's multiple reminders of mandatory notices to appear in Juvenile Court, minors are less likely to miss their court date. Whereas, if the minor does miss their court date a warrant for their arrest will be issued and upon execution will be detained. Therefore, with increased attendance at court hearings will result in less warrants being issued with the ultimate result of less minors being unnecessarily detained.

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<sup>7</sup> See attached post-arraignment reminder post card, Exhibit \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>8</sup> Average calculated from average daily notices reported from October, 2004 through October, 2005.