

New Jersey Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative
 Innovation, Improvement, or Institutionalization of Policy/Practice:
 Model Activities

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Site:	ESSEX
Primary Core Strategy Area:	Detention Alternatives
Secondary Core Strategy Area:	Collaboration/Leadership
Title/Name of Activity:	Detention Alternatives Policies & Procedures Manual and Alternatives Continuum
Activity Start Date:	8/2007
Description of Activity:	A Manual Working Group was formed in 8/2007 and met bi-weekly. The group reviewed the Detention Alternatives Manual page-by-page to confirm its accuracy, and to ensure all key actors were fully informed of the processes within each Alternative program and across the Continuum, and that they held a shared understanding of those processes.
Problem or Need this Activity Addressed:	In 2006 the Detention Alternatives Subcommittee developed a Policies & Procedures Manual. However, changes in practice occurred over time, and not all policies were implemented exactly as originally planned. The Subcommittee recognized the importance of continuously reviewing written policies/procedures to ensure they comport with actual practice, and vice-versa. Accurate, written documentation ensures all stakeholders, including new key actors and contractors/service-providers, are on the same page in terms of how the Alternatives Continuum operates.
Data/Info that Identified this Problem or Need:	<p>The Workgroup relied on data, the experiences of key actors in the day-to-day operation of the Alternatives Continuum, and related discussion to identify issues in the use of Alternatives, and to identify where Manual revisions were required.</p> <p>For example, in Essex, programs higher on the Continuum are intended to serve higher risk youth, and programs lower on the Continuum serve lower risk youth. In the original Continuum, the Evening Reporting Center (ERC) was higher on the Continuum than Electronic Monitoring (EM). However, data regarding youth admitted to each Alternative, as well as local experience, indicated that in practice youth assigned solely to the ERC are actually lower-risk than youth assigned to EM. As such, a reorganization of the Continuum and revisions to related written policies/procedures were needed.</p> <p>Additionally, the original Manual was written assuming each youth would be placed in one Alternative program. The court, however, frequently assigns youth to more than one program (e.g., EM + ERC). For example, during the last six months of 2007, of the 477 admissions to Alternatives, 131, or 21.8 per month, involved dual-programs (27.5%). While the goal of increasing supervision to avoid secure detention is well-intended, the group recognized that over-reliance on simultaneous use of multiple programs can have unintended consequences, including limiting the number of youth who can be safely served in the community at any given time. The group therefore agreed to limit this practice to exceptional cases, and made necessary revisions to the Manual.</p> <p>Finally, Essex began implementing the Risk Screening Tool (RST) during the same time the Manual was under review. This major change in the way juveniles are admitted to Alternatives had implications for the Detention Alternatives Policies & Procedures Manual, again pointing to the ongoing, continuous nature of this work. Essex worked to update the Manual to reflect the new policies that accompany the use of the RST as they relate to Detention Alternatives, including referral sources and admissions processes.</p>

Impact/Results of this Activity:	<p>After many months of revisions, and even a change in service provider for one of the Alternatives, the Manual was completely updated, approved by the Alternatives Subcommittee and the County Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement, and distributed to all stakeholders. The goal of providing new key actors with accurate, information has been achieved, in that the Manual provides the administration of the new ERC with program expectations, and also demonstrates the level of collaboration inherent in Essex County Alternatives.</p> <p>Additionally, Essex now routinely tracks the dual-use of Alternatives as part of its Detention Alternatives report. The first report following the dual-use policy change described above indicated the goal of reducing the use of multiple programs had been achieved. During the first three months of 2008, dual-use was cut in half compared to the findings from 2007 noted above. Of the 251 Alternatives admissions, just 33, or 11.0 per month, involved dual-programs (13.1%), as compared to 21.8 per month (27.5%) during the last six months of 2007.</p>
Next Steps or Additional Comments:	<p>Given that JDAI is a continuous process of system improvement, the Detention Alternatives Subcommittee will keep a continuous eye on the accuracy of the Manual in order to keep all stakeholders well-informed, and to determine if any additional adjustments are needed to the policies or practices described in the Manual.</p>
List Attachments (if any):	<p>Detention Alternatives Policy & Procedures Manual (with appendices)</p>
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