

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

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Site:	MERCER
Primary Core Strategy Area:	Reducing Delay/Case Processing
Secondary Core Strategy Area:	Collaboration/Leadership
Title/Name of Activity:	Addressing Increases in Detention ADP During the Holidays
Activity Start Date:	11/1/2007
Problem or Need this Activity Addressed:	<p>During the holiday season there are fewer available court/business days due to court recess, state holidays, and vacation time taken by juvenile justice personnel. As a result, detention centers in NJ often experience an increase in average daily population (ADP) during this time - fewer court days lead to a back-up in case processing, case processing delays lead to longer lengths-of-stay (LOS) in detention, and increased LOS leads to increased ADP.</p>
Description of Activity:	<p>Mercer worked proactively to avoid the increase in ADP that often occurs around the holidays. The Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) prioritized moving appropriate youth out of alternatives, either by stepping-down supervision level or by resolving their court case. This opened-up alternatives slots so that eligible youth in the detention center could be released to an alternative without delay. The MDT then targeted youth in the detention center scheduled for dispositional placement around or after the holidays, and contacted the programs to move up as many placement dates as possible. Additionally, instead of the lighter calendar that typically follows the holidays/vacations, the judge instructed court staff to schedule a full calendar. Moreover, in the past court staff waited for the judge's return from vacation to determine which cases to place/prioritize on the post-holiday calendar, which contributed to delays. Instead, the judge more or less remained on-call to ensure action could be taken in appropriate cases during the holidays, and to help strategize regarding the post-holiday calendar.</p> <p>While concrete changes in practice are a critical piece of system reform, so to is something less tangible or quantifiable. As so poignantly stated by the Honorable F. Lee Forrester, juvenile judge and Chair of both the Mercer County and New Jersey Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"To be certain, some money has been spent, programs developed and case processing streamlined. Nevertheless, several years into the initiative, there can be little doubt that the key ingredient of success is the collective commitment and shared sense of ownership among local stakeholders regarding one central objective ---- placing and maintaining children in detention only when necessary and not one day longer than necessary."</p>
Data/Info that Identified this Problem or Need:	<p>During the 3-month period of November 2006 through January 2007, Mercer's ADP spiked to 73, a 26% increase over the prior 3-month period (Aug-Oct 2006), when ADP was 58. Then, in the 3-month period following the holiday season (Feb-Apr 2007), ADP returned to 53 youth, a decrease of 27%.</p>
Impact/Results of this Activity:	<p>The strategies implemented kept ADP stable during the 2007/2008 holiday season. During the 3-month period November 2007 through January 2008, ADP was 55, which actually represents a 2% decrease from the prior 3-month period (Aug-Oct 2007), when ADP was 56. Additionally, ADP during the 2007/2008 (55) holiday season was 25% lower than the ADP seen during the prior 2006/2007 holiday season (73).</p>

Next Steps or Additional Comments:	In light of the positive impact, the MDT will continue to implement these strategies over future holiday periods, and work on additional strategies to keep the ADP stable during periods of potential/anticipated spikes. (Note: The positive effect was in fact maintained during the 2008/2009 holiday season.)
List Attachments (if any):	Graph: Mercer Strategies for Addressing Increase in ADP During Holiday Season
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Mercer Strategies for Addressing Increase in ADP During Holiday Season: Summary of Impact

