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UNDERSTANDING YOUTH DEFLECTION & PRE-ARREST DIVERSION

PTACC Youth Deflection Strategy Area

Youth deflection and pre-arrest diversion initiatives are innovative strategies aimed at providing early, "upstream" support to young people who are either:

(1) displaying behaviors associated with delinquency;

(2) at risk of becoming engaged in the justice system; or

(3) already have committed minor offenses and are at risk of moving further into the juvenile justice system or into the adult system.

Consistent with deflection for adults, youth deflection does not wait for nor need an arrest, crisis, or situation to act. Especially for youth, meaningful engagement cannot wait for a situation to become a crisis. For young people, the impact of delinquency, arrest, and conviction can last a lifetime, with possible implications for their immediate future such as being unable to join the military or receive acollege scholarship.

Youth deflection initiatives focus on keeping youth in school and with their family, in the community, while redirecting youth away from the justice system. Youth deflection offers guidance, mentorship, and support to help youth positively shift their life trajectory as they learn healthy life skills and practice personal accountability.

CHALLENGES

Youth today face many challenges moving from childhood into adolescence. These may include peer pressure, exacerbated by social media; availability of alcohol, marijuana, vaping, and illegal drugs; physical or verbal bullying; academic pressures; grappling with sexuality and sexual behavior; hormonal changes, which can affect physical changes and emotional regulation; and uncertainties in finding their own unique pathways. Many youths face additional challenges such as housing insecurity, including homelessness and foster care placements; lack of parental support and guidance; parental addiction or mental health issues; lack of advocacy and treatment availability; community violence; disruptive or unsafe home environments, including households with sexual, physical, and/or emotional abuse; and a lack of healthy adult supervision and protection. All these risk factors contribute to the potential for youth to act out, take unsafe risks, and encounter law enforcement when their behavior becomes destructive or harmful to themselves or others.

DEFLECTION & PRE-ARREST DIVERSION

Deflection, including pre-arrest diversion, provides an alternative to an arrest record, while providing accountability and connection to resources, especially focusing on youth who may be coping withsubstance use or mental health issues.

Deflection for juveniles is the practice by which law enforcement or others in a youth's sphere (such asschool, child welfare, social worker, religious leader, civic organization) connect juveniles manifesting atrisk behaviors to community-based treatment and/or services in lieu of formal engagement with law enforcement or arrest. This early intervention, often to substance use intervention, mental health, or family support services, provides an alternative pathway for youth.

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RATIONALE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUTH DEFLECTION

- **REDUCTION IN DELINQUENCY:**

  Early intervention can prevent a cycle of delinquent behavior before it starts or progresses to a more critical stage of recidivism. Addressing the root causes of delinquency at a young age can lead to long-term positive outcomes.

- **AVOIDING THE LEGAL CONSEQUENCES OR COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES OF JUVENILE RECORDS:**

  Having a juvenile record can severely impact a young person's future opportunities, including employment and education. Youth deflection and diversion programs help youth avoid these long-term negative effects and instill personal accountability for their behavior.

- **COST-EFFECTIVENESS:**

  Diverting youth from the justice system can be more cost-effective thanformal processing and incarceration. It reduces the strain on the justice system and the associated costs.

- **BETTER OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH:**

  These programs are often more tailored to the individual needs of the youth, offering a more holistic accountability approach than the traditional justice system.

- **INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:**

  Many countries have recognized the long-term benefits of focusing on rehabilitation and support for youth rather than punishment. This has led to the adoption of similar programs worldwide.

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POTENTIAL YOUTH DEFLECTION INTERSECTS VIA COMMUNITY PARTNERS

There are numerous opportunities in an adolescent's life where problems may be manifested and an opportunity for deflection is possible.

Some of these include:

SCHOOL • Teachers, coaches, school counselors, and school resource officers are daily witnesses to adolescent behavior and early indications that a youth has behavioral issues, substance use, or mental health challenges.

CHILD WELFARE • The child welfare case manager has frequent contact with identified youth and their families. Home visits and family interventions are ideal opportunities to identify youth who may be engaging in risky or increasingly troublesome behavior.

LAW ENFORCEMENT • Officers patrolling the community are often aware of youth who are at risk, are in early gang involvement, have experienced trauma or violence, or have a lack of adult supervision. These signals present an opportunity to connect youth to services prior to an escalation in problematic behaviors.

HEALTH/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH • Many youths present at behavioral health clinics or other agencies because of parental or guardian concerns. These are ideal opportunities to engage the youth in needed services.

SOCIAL WORK • Counselors, community service agencies, housing providers, and others who regularly observe youth behavior often can identify service needs for youth. These opportunitiescan be utilized to engage youth and their families in targeted intervention plans.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS/COALITIONS • Children and youth often spend time at camps, faithcommunity gatherings, recreational centers, and after-school care. These more casual settings can provide opportunities for caring adults to identify youth who may be at risk and initiate referrals to appropriate supports. Community coalitions in each state provide great opportunities and resources for local groups. Nationally, **CADCA** (cadca.org) is a membership organization that offers a wealth of training resources for states, organizations, and professionals focused on building healthy, drug-free communities and empowering youth.

OPTIONAL COMPONENTS OF YOUTH DEFLECTION AND PRE-ARREST DIVERSION

1. **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS**
These focus on taking responsibility and repairing the harm caused by acts of delinquency. These programs often involve meetings between those who have caused harm and those they have harmed, with the goal of promoting understanding and healing.

2. **MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT**
For youth struggling with mental health issues or problem substance use, programs offer treatment and counseling as an alternative to incarceration.

3. **EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS**
These programs provide educational support or vocational training to help youth develop skills and find employment.

4. **MENTORING AND COUNSELING**
Offering personal guidance through mentoring and counseling can help youth address personal challenges and make positive life choices.

5. **COMMUNITY SERVICE**
Some deflection and pre-arrest diversion (DPAD) programs require youth to complete community service, which helps them make amends to the community and understand the impact of their actions.

6. **FAMILY-BASED INTERVENTIONS**
Involving the family in the intervention process can be crucial, as family dynamics often play a significant role in a young person's behavior.

7. **MONITORING AND SUPERVISION**
Some programs include a level of monitoring or supervision to ensure compliance and provide ongoing support.

8. **ADULT DEFLECTION INITIATIVES**
These initiatives can build partnerships to identify and refer children of existing deflection participants to preventive and early intervention services that can help stabilize families, provide social support, and help reduce the long-term impact of adverse childhood experience (ACES) and children impacted by the disease of addiction (COA's).

KEY YOUTH DEFLECTION PRINCIPLES

To provide comprehensive services to identified youth and their families, there are key principles that should guide this intervention, including:

- **EARLY INTERVENTION** – Engage an adolescent and their family as soon as there is an indication of problem behavior.
- **ASSESSMENT** – A comprehensive assessment identifies behavioral challenges and service needs of both the youth and their family.
- **ADVOCACY AND ASSESSMENT FOR POSSIBLE EXPLOITATION** – Review the youth's needs for appropriate advocacy, rights, and protection should they be a victim of a crime or abuse against them.
- **COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE ARRAY** – Identifying and linking existing community services allows for an integrated approach to service delivery and helps reveal gaps in service. Mental health and substance use disorder services geared to engaging with adolescents are critical for success.
- **MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM** – A youth's pathway to treatment and social services is best guided by a multidisciplinary team including counselors, substance use disorder and mental health professionals, school personnel, child welfare representatives, and law enforcement when appropriate.
- **DATA DRIVEN** – All programming for adolescents should be driven by data and the structured interventions modified as the data indicates.

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YOUTH DEFLECTION AS A WAY TO REDUCE DRUG USE AND DRUG-RELATED CRIME

- Youth deflection can help to break the intergenerational nature of addiction that especially influences and harms our youth.
- Ensure that treatment options show proficiency in working with youth populations.
- When drug use is present in the home, the family will also need to be in treatment and family-based therapy.
- A holistic approach will lead to a reduction in drug use, with the goal always being prevention first and then recovery, which in turn leads to a reduction in drug-related behaviors and drug-related crime.

DEFLECTION PATHWAYS FOR ADOLESCENTS

Three of the deflection pathways defined by the Police, Treatment, and Community Collaborative (PTACC) are particularly relevant to interventions with adolescents.

These include:

ACTIVE OUTREACH

Child welfare case managers, social workers, and youth leaders play a key role in identifying a youth in need and making an early intervention.

FIRST RESPONDER & OFFICER REFERRAL

A first responder engages the youth and family during routine activities or because of a service call, and provides a referral to treatment, services, and a case manager.

OFFICER INTERVENTION

In a situation where youth is involved in delinquent activity and charges could be filed, law enforcement provides a formal referral to assessment and treatment utilizing a formal deflection or civil citation process. Charges are then held in abeyance until treatment and/or the social service plan is successfully completed.

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YOUTH DEFLECTION MODELS

There are a variety of juvenile deflection models being utilized across the United States, including:

CIVIL CITATION

The civil citation program in Florida assures that every youth statewide who commits a minor offense has the opportunity to avoid an arrest. The program is utilized in all sixty-seven counties in the state. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice outlines the benefits, keeps youth that pose little threat to public safety out of the system, reduces the cost of processing youth for misdemeanors, frees up resources to focus on more serious and violent offenses, and serves equitable percentages of eligible minority youth. The Department states that the extremely low recidivism rate (4%) for youth who participate in civil citation is an indicator of the remarkable success of this approach.

PRE-CHARGE DIVERSION PROGRAMS

In Iowa, pre-charge diversion programs provide a standardized structure to keep low-risk youth out of the juvenile justice system. A key component is to make sure that youth have equal access to the benefits of diversion. Youth in pre-charge diversion had lower recidivism rates (11.4%) compared to youth served by Juvenile Court Services (29.5%).

HANDLE WITH CARE (HWC)

The HWC model is a simple yet powerful example of one way that adult deflection initiatives can support children and youth. In the HWC model, when law enforcement encounters a child at the scene of an incident, they identify the child and send a notice to their school that they were involved in a police incident the night before and may have academic or behavioral problems that day. The notice includes no details about the incident and contains only the child's name and three words: Handle with Care. The school receives the notice before the start of the school day, so that staff are prepared to "handle the child with care" and respond in a trauma-informed way. Schools with HWC in place also partner with mental health professionals to provide on-site therapy services for children if necessary.

R STREET INSTITUTE (RSI)

RSI emphasizes a systems approach to reducing juvenile arrests. Their study, "Data-Driven Deflection: A Systems Approach to Reducing Juvenile Arrests," discusses the importance of early intervention in addressing delinquent behavior, thereby avoiding negative outcomes associated with formal justice system involvement. The study examines case studies and data collection techniques essential for successful juvenile deflection programs. It highlights how robust data collection and cross-system cooperation can minimize youth contact with the justice system, highlighting successful initiatives such as Florida's Civil Citation program and Cambridge, Massachusetts' Safety Net Collaborative.

YOUTH DEFLECTION EFFECTIVENESS AND OUTCOMES MEASUREMENTS

- **RECIDIVISM RATES:** Monitor the rates at which participants reoffend; have ongoing conact with law enforcement, regardless of whether it is positive or negative.
- **PROGRAM COMPLETION RATES:** Evaluate the percentage of participants who successfully complete the program.
- **BEHAVIORAL CHANGES:** Assess improvements in behavior, accountability, and decision-making skills.
- **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:** Track changes in school attendance and grades.
- **MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES:** Evaluate improvements in mental health through assessments.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK:** Gather qualitative feedback from families and community members.
- **LONG-TERM OUTCOMES:** Monitor participants' long-term integration into society, such as employment rates and stable housing.

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How Do I Connect with PTACC?

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