

Re-Entry

It is estimated that approximately 100,000 youth are returned to the community from residential and secure juvenile justice facilities every year (Sickmund, 2000). With this volume, it is essential that programming be in place that adequately responds to the needs of youth returning to their communities. Juvenile offenders provided with a structured aftercare treatment plan fare better in the community and have lower recidivism rates than those without a re-entry plan (SAMHSA, 2002). Without structured aftercare and supervision services, it is more likely that these youth will return to correctional institutions (OJP, 2004).

While recent attention has focused on improving the identification and treatment of youth with mental health disorders in contact with the juvenile justice system, much less emphasis has been placed on the development of re-entry or aftercare initiatives specifically designed for youth with mental health disorders being released from juvenile detention or correctional facilities back into the community. Far less is known about this as an issue for juveniles than is known for adults, and there is a general lack of research and knowledge about effective principles and practice for youth with mental health disorders re-entering the community.

While focused on youth in general and not specifically on youth with mental health disorders, David Altschuler and Troy Armstrong, leading experts on aftercare and re-entry initiatives for juveniles, advocate that a successful aftercare or re-entry strategy for high risk youth leaving secure confinement must include coordinated and comprehensive planning, information exchange, continuity, consistency, service provision and referral, and monitoring. Service brokerage with community resources and linkages to social networks and supports is considered critical.

The knowledge base on re-entry programs for youth with mental health disorders leaving the juvenile justice system is just developing. One of the few studies focused on youth with mental health disorders transitioning back to the community offers what has been suggested from the adult and juvenile delinquency literature in general: that youth provided with a structured post-release treatment plan do better in the community and recidivate less frequently than youth who did not benefit from a comprehensive re-entry plan (Trupin, et.al 1999).

The information included in this chapter of the Resource Kit is designed to provide a general overview of the issue of juvenile re-entry for youth leaving juvenile justice facilities and transitioning back to their communities, as well as the most current research and information available on juvenile re-entry services for youth with mental health needs.

References

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