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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC) identified the reentry system for youth in justice facilities as an area for system improvement. The JJPOC made several recommendations on how best to review the system, which are in Public Act 23-188, [Section 3, which](#) requires the Executive Director of the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division and the Commissioners of the Department of Children and Families and the Commissioner of the Department of Correction to develop a Reentry Success Plan no later than November 2023 and present to the JJPOC by January 2024.

The Incarceration Workgroup of the JJPOC established a Reentry Subgroup that has met for over 12 months to perform due diligence and research to understand the current array of reentry services that exist in Connecticut including a gap analysis to determine what is happening in CT and what areas need critical attention. While various reentry services exist for young people in the state of Connecticut, the services are spread across multiple agencies, providers, and locations making it challenging for young people and their families to access the full breadth of reentry services that support successful reentry.

Over the past year, the reentry subgroup of the JJPOC explored the current state of reentry in Connecticut keeping the requirements for Public Act 23-188, Section 3 in mind:

- 1.) The provision of individualized academic support and the role of school districts
- 2.) The connection of youth to vocational and workforce opportunities;
- 3.) The connection of youth to developmentally appropriate housing;
- 4.) The delivery of trauma-informed mental health and substance use treatments;
- 5.) The development of restorative justice reentry circles;
- 6.) The use of credible messengers as mentors or transition support providers;
- 7.) The role of reentry coordinators;
- 8.) The need for a quality assurance framework and data reporting;
- 9.) Sources of federal and state funding; and
- 10.) The identification of priorities and timelines for implementation of the Connecticut Reentry Success Plan

The group reviewed reentry services in CT, including those utilized by Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division, the Department of Correction, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Department of Children and Families, Department of Labor, as well as the types of reentry services provided to adults through the Re-entry Roundtables and Welcome Centers. They also looked at programming in New Jersey, Maine, Washington, Chicago, Oklahoma, New York, and Michigan and subsequently received presentations from juvenile justice practitioners in New Jersey and Maine to learn about their reentry models.

The Reentry Subgroup collaborated with DOH, DOL, DSS, CSDE, DCF, JBCSSD, DOC, DMHAS, JJPOC CEW, JJPOC Education Workgroup, and JJPOC Incarceration Workgroup. It was also important to the group to hear from youth directly impacted. To that end, the Reentry Subgroup met with youth at MYI and

received survey results from JBCSSD that youth completed with their clinician.<sup>1</sup> A guided discussion was conducted with youth at the following facilities:

- Bridgeport Secure
- Hartford Secure
- CPA Hamden Secure
- Journey House Limited Secure
- CPA Hartford Staff Secure
- CJR Waterbury Staff Secure
- CJR AMIR
- CJR TEAMS/TRAC (also known as the new Community Diversion & Respite Center....CDRC)

The recommendations and solutions below were developed after an exhaustive process to create a Coordinating entity for reentry services in Connecticut that would pull together a multi-agency collaboration to create a holistic approach to assessing and addressing individual reentry needs immediately upon a young person's admission to a facility. Agency and system coordination should at a minimum address needed mental health services, housing supports, transportation needs, appropriate mentor, substance use treatment and prevention services, transitional support, vocational opportunities, education, and restorative justice -- the main barriers to successful reentry.

### *Findings*

*To be summarized when complete.....*

### *Recommendations*

*To be summarized when complete.....*

## **BACKGROUND**

Reentry programs have been identified as a way to combat high recidivism rates. Nearly two-thirds of youth who end up in secure confinement have been convicted of nonviolent offenses. The typical sentence for youth who are sentenced to detention is 4-6 months.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the daily expense of supervising a probationer is twenty times less than the average expense of incarcerating an individual in prison or jail. The costs of imprisonment is increasing while the benefits are decreasing substantially.<sup>3</sup> Every year over 100,000 juveniles nationally are released from detention facilities and out of home placements, too often returning to communities with high crime rates, poverty, unstable households, underfunded school systems, and unemployment. Over 70% of those in the system have at least one diagnosed mental illness and many

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Addendum A. While 40 youth completed JBCSSD's Reentry Survey with a clinician, the statistics within this report represent the youth who responded to the question; not all youth responded to each question. Additionally, the quotes provided in this report are a clinician's extrapolations from their conversations with each young person.

<sup>2</sup> The Sentencing Project. (2012, June). Youth Reentry. (<https://jje.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Youth-Reentry.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> NJ Reentry Corporation. (2023). About NJ Reentry Corporation. <https://www.njreentry.org/about>

have family members who have also been incarcerated, leaving them in dire need of support from their communities.

Another complication facing youth is that many in the juvenile justice system have a mental health disorder, and support services in their home communities are hard to arrange until they are formally released. This can cause a gap in services that negatively hinders the reentry process.

Therefore, it is critical to provide these youth with solid reentry resources and programs. The justice system, related agencies, and communities must plan for what needs to occur for reentry when youth enter the juvenile justice system by planning exit upon entry. Unfortunately, young people leaving residential placement face many challenges as they reenter the community, including unstable home settings, school experiences, and lack of skills for employment. Youth need connections to mentors, case managers, and opportunities for education and employment for life post-detainment to be successful. To improve the odds of youth successfully reentering the community, coordination and collaboration between agencies and across services and supports are necessary at multiple phases of reentry.

For example, youth who participated in the Arches Transformative Mentoring Program while on probation in New York recidivated 69% less within 12 months and 57% less within 24 months of probation.<sup>4</sup>

With successful reentry planning youth develop resiliency and mature into successful adults through supportive family relationships, engagement in school, the development of critical life skills, and gainful employment. These critical factors develop a youth's confidence and divert them from behaviors that are harmful or deemed delinquent in nature. Reentry programs that are truly comprehensive focus on these areas of development to set youth on a positive track for their futures.

Congress passed the Second Chance Act in 2007 to provide federal grants for services that reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for persons previously convicted and sentenced. These programs receive funding for operations, research, and evaluations. The population benefiting from these supportive networks have completed their court ordered sentences and are integrating back into their communities. Programs supported by the Second Chance Act in accordance with OJJDP guidelines provide that effective reentry is established long before release from a facility. The planning process for reentry should begin the day that an individual is formally placed in a facility. Successful reentry programs stage reentry into two phases, a planning and release phase, and a monitoring and follow-up phase, each of which provide different challenges. The Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018 expanded the provision of federal grants for the operation of community-based substance abuse treatment, and assistance with employment, housing, family support, as well as other programming. Connecticut will have the ability to apply for these funds to support the implementation of the reentry recommendations outlined in this plan.

## **NATIONAL LANDSCAPE**

The Reentry Subgroup of the Incarceration Workgroup not only reviewed the current array of reentry services that exist in Connecticut but also national models which have promising reentry strategies. The

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<sup>4</sup> [69% Less Recidivism in NY Community Mentoring Program, Report Finds](https://www.jjje.org/69%LessRecidivisminNYCommunityMentoringProgram,ReportFinds) [Juvenile Justice Information Exchange \(jjje.org\)](https://www.jjje.org/)

group invited presentations from the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission and Maine Department of Corrections.

### **New Jersey Reentry Hub Model**

Through [Senate Bill 2924](#) New Jersey's Juvenile Justice Commission established the *Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youth and Communities Pilot Program* focused on the development of reentry hubs in communities with large numbers of justice impacted youth. This request and model for offering reentry services lessens the burden of lengthy travel that may have otherwise prevented a young person and their family from accessing reentry services. In addition to reducing the transportation burden, the hub brings support and service providers together in a coordinated effort to provide reentry supports and services in the youth's community. This pilot is located in four large urban New Jersey cities with some of the highest rates of justice impacted youth, Trenton, Paterson, Newark, and Camden. This reentry pilot program is designed to last two years, with a budget of 4.8 million dollars, with the potential of program expansion after the pilot and success of the program is evaluated by Rutgers University.

The focus of the reentry hubs is on restorative and transformative justice, with the requirement that each hub offer mental health services, substance use prevention and treatment services, educational supports, employment services, housing supports, financial literacy and debt support, life skills, social support services, preventative mentoring, community conferencing, and peace circles. Practitioners from New Jersey note that additional resources can be brought into the hub or youth can be referred out for additional resources, but the 10 aforementioned supports and services must be provided by the reentry hub in each of the four pilot communities. Furthermore, the 10 identified supports and services are going to be offered on site at the reentry hub with an option to offer supports and services in the home of the youth and their family. The placement of reentry hubs in communities with the highest levels of justice impacted youth is to reduce the burden on youth and their families from traveling distances to receive reentry services at multiple sites, and to ensure the coordination of services and case management. The hub requires its employees to be RTJ (Restorative and Transformative Justice) Practice certified.

NJ's pilot program utilizes Restorative Justice Practices and Principles and provides community-based enhanced reentry wraparound services that include:

- Mental health services;
- Substance use disorders treatment and recovery;
- Education support;
- Employment services;
- Housing support;
- Financial literacy and debt support services;
- Life skills support services;
- Social support services; and
- Preventative mentoring services.

### **Maine Reentry Housing Model**

Long Creek Youth Development Center in Maine is a small facility housing approximately 29 male youth, some of whom are being detained temporarily until they are released by the court and some who have been adjudicated.

- The Long Creek Youth Development Center connects young people to their returning school placement, job opportunities, case management agencies, and aid in finding housing.
- Long Creek Youth Development Center acts as a step-down transition to going home. All treatment in the facility is outpatient and within the surrounding community, however youth develop practical life skills living in this transitional house type setting, inasmuch as they are responsible for cleaning, grocery shopping, personal money management and contributing to the household as needed.

### **Equipping Youth to Help One Another Program (EQUIP WA)**

This program combines two established programs: Positive Peer Culture (PPC) training and Aggression Replacement Training (ART) for youth that have conduct disorders. The purpose of the peer training environment is to teach the youth social skills and developmentally appropriate moral-reasoning skills. These sessions are focused on providing positive role-models, feedback, and practice situations to further develop these skills.

### **Project BUILD (Chicago, IL)**

BUILD Violence Intervention Curriculum teach students a variety of new life skills, receive additional academic tutoring and assistance, participate in sports and recreational activities, go on field trips, and engage in leadership development and civic engagement. The BUILD Violence Intervention Curriculum includes components such as socio-emotional learning, positive youth development, and restorative justice. Youth may receive anything from one workshop to the full 10-week session of the curriculum.

### **Skill-Building Interventions for Delinquent Behaviors of Youth Practice (OK)**

This program caters to 12–21-year-olds and focuses on providing instruction and activities that help youth develop and enhance skills to control their behavior and increase participation. Skill-building interventions can involve a variety of different skill-building approaches including cognitive-behavioral, social skills, academic skills and vocational skills.

### **The Youth Build Offender Program (NY)**

This program originated in Harlem, New York but moved to Massachusetts and has 30 locations located both nationally and internationally. It targets low-income youth by providing them with an amenable environment and opportunity for building education and life skills and lasts anywhere from 9 to 24 months in which participants alternate weekly between education courses and vocational skills courses and opportunities for housing supports, transportation, and childcare.

### **Wayne County Second Chance Reentry Program (MI)**

This program focuses on young men between the ages of 13 - 18 and utilizes six best practices of reentry: 1) objectively assessing youth's criminogenic needs, 2) enhancing youths' intrinsic motivation, 3) targeting youths at high risk for offending, 4) addressing criminogenic needs of youths at high risk for offending, 5) using cognitive-behavioral interventions, and 6) determining appropriate treatment dosage and intensity of services for youths. Each youth is assigned a reentry specialist that meets monthly with them, their residential team, and their caregivers.

### **Connecticut:**

#### **Behind the Wall Navigators**

DOC to add language describing this model.

#### **Connecticut Reentry Roundtables**

There should be a section on the Reentry Roundtables that are currently serving adults coming out of DOC. What services and supports do the roundtables offer? Where located? Volume of clients served annually? State funded or federal and state funded?

#### **Connecticut REGIONS Reintegration Mentors**

JBCSSD to add language describing the role of the reintegration mentor, service and supports provided, length of service (upon admission through 12 months post-discharge to community).

#### **Juvenile Justice Education Unit**

JJEU to add language describing the Unit.

## **IDENTIFIED GAPS IN CONNECTICUT**

There is great variability in access to services and supports for youth leaving juvenile residential and correctional facilities. Some of the variability depends on the youth's legal status; release from pretrial detention or release from an adjudication and a return to the community with or without supervision by a juvenile probation officer, a bail commissioner, or an adult probation or parole officer. Other variabilities are driven by the location to which the youth returns and the youth's specific risks, needs, and family and community supports already in place.

There is no one stop shop for reentry care coordination for youth, which leaves youth and families stuck trying to navigate from one appointment to the next, sometimes across the state, access to the various resources and services they need to create a sustainable foundation for successful re-entry. Services for youth and families of youth reentering communities are fragmented among many agencies and service providers. Navigating this fragmented system is incredibly challenging without knowledgeable supportive persons or organizations to provide assistance.

### **Educational Support**

The creation of the Juvenile Justice Education Unit in Public Act 21-174 is a major reform that came about from JJPOC to eliminate the fragmentation in educational services for youth in justice system facilities.

Educational services are fragmented across multiple state, local, and contracted agencies. The state's two juvenile detention centers in Hartford and Bridgeport offer diverging pedagogical instruction models. While

the Hartford Detention Center contracts with private education providers, the Bridgeport Detention Center's educational programming is provided by the Bridgeport Board of Education. Analogous approaches are employed by secure treatment programs and community residential programs across the state—students receive education support from either municipal board of educations or a contracted organization. While meaningful progress has been made ensuring justice involved youth admitted to out-of-home placement have access to the highest quality of educational programming, communication challenges exchanging education records across education service providers remains a central issue. Other identified obstacles include differences between each school district curricula. Consequently, transferring credit or even receiving partial credit for classes taken while in detention and or a residential treatment program only compound existing challenges. Broader implications not only hinder student progress but also cripple earnest achievements once youth transition back to their homes, schools, and communities, meaning system providers must work harder to make the transition robust. JJPOC to this end has already begun to reform these through the passage of Public Act 18-31 and the creation of the Juvenile Justice Education Unit in Public Act 21-174.

While Connecticut provides some reentry services and supports, many challenges remain.

- 1.) Schools in which students were enrolled in prior to their placement in a facility do not receive regular updates on the student's educational performance and anticipated discharge date. A lack of notice of when the student is returning results in no plan and delays in school reentrance, which causes a lack of engagement and attendance for many reentering students.
- 2.) A general lack of educational services for students on house arrest or who can't attend their original home school safely due to peer conflicts and/or neighborhood violence.
- 3.) Not all young people leaving facilities are leaving with adequate or proper identification documents, including but not limited to Birth Certificate, Personal Identification Card or Driver's License, and Social Security Card, which are needed to enroll in new schools, vocational programs, post-secondary education, and to gain employment.

### **Vocational Support**

Prevention literature emphasizes the need to include comprehensive vocational opportunities to foster positive social interactions, communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills. Nationally, jurisdictions that have established strong partnerships between both juvenile justice and workforce development systems have continuously demonstrated prioritizing vocational re-entry opportunities which have not only improved community safety but also substantially reduced re-arrest and subsequent juvenile justice contact.<sup>5</sup>

Connecticut has countless programs to aid justice involved youth gain work-readiness skills, vocational and other career-oriented opportunities, but they are not equitably accessible to all youth. Few youth workforce development services conduct career interests and skills assessment in juvenile facilities or make direct outreach into facilities. Best practices, based on research and feedback from national experts, add soft employment skills such as interviewing, resume building, job searching, application supports, guidance for completing financial aid and college applications are needed to guide systemwide improvement efforts.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, integrating workforce consideration into intake procedures, probation, community service delivery and re-entry plans should be developed to increase system capacity to better prepare youth for

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<sup>5</sup> <https://ccastates.org/system/files/CCAS-DOL-Funding-508.pdf>; See also, <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-crc-surviving-thriving.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CSG\\_Juvenile-Workforce-Development-Brief.pdf](https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CSG_Juvenile-Workforce-Development-Brief.pdf)



seamless re-entry transitions. Improved coordination and cross-systems partnerships can build strong connections with youth prior to their release into the community and connect them with essential workforce support the day of their release. Research shows programs that involve seamless employment opportunities, paid volunteer incentives, and other employment related activity are key.

It is paramount that efforts to address occupational and the education and needs of youth are centered on youth driven goals and tailored to labor market demands. Strong workforce developments plans are needed to weaken the connection between post-education opportunity, academic failure, and juvenile justice involvement.

Three gaps in vocational supports were identified:

- 1.) Young people who are system impacted have limited access to vocational programming because they can't access the CT Technical High School System.
- 2.) Vocational skills and certifications learned and earned in facilities do not translate necessarily to job placement when youth return to the community.
- 3.) Many youth lack the skills, confidence, wherewithal, and persistence to find or keep a job.
- 4.) Youth employment opportunities are often only available for a short time over the summer and are not extended throughout the entire school year.

### **Restorative Justice**

**Restorative Justice works to restore those who have been injured: victims, communities, and offenders in a process of healing and resolution of how to deal with the aftermath of an offense and prevent future harm.**

Two gaps pertaining to restorative justice in the reentry process were identified.

- 1.) Apart from circles, there is a lack of restorative practices used consistently in facilities
- 2.) Contracted providers in the community have a lack of training and support for infusing restorative justice principles in their programming.

### **Credible Messengers or Mentors**

Credible Messenger programming is a critical component of our current youth re-entry system. The term credible messenger is often used interchangeably with other youth mentorship programs. Yet, across the state, youth mentorship programs have not followed an analogous implementation. The OJJDP National Mentoring Resource Center (NMRC) recognizes credible messengers as individuals who share lived experience—traditionally individuals impacted by the juvenile-justice system—with the youth, they are mentoring.<sup>7</sup> The shared experience between youth and credible messenger mentors uniquely positions mentors to provide youth with a living example of hope and opportunity.<sup>8</sup> Both prevention literature and the voices of young people have confirmed credible messenger mentorship has a sustainable impact on youth recidivism rates. A multiyear Urban Institute evaluation on a New York based, showed credible messengers program participants were less likely to be reconvicted of a crime when compared to youth in a matched propensity group who were not afforded credible messenger supports. Reconviction rates for youth paired with a credible messenger were 69 percent lower 12 months after beginning probation and 57 percent

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<sup>7</sup> <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/resource/group-mentoring-model/#what-factors-condition-or-influence-the-effectiveness-of-group-mentoring->

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.nyc.gov/assets/probation/pdf/press/arches\\_transformative\\_mentoring\\_program\\_0.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/probation/pdf/press/arches_transformative_mentoring_program_0.pdf)

lower 24 months after beginning probation.<sup>9</sup> While research has noted Credible Messengers improve education and program engagement for youth credible messenger mentorships are not a substitute for education, employment, housing, or substance abuse treatment supports.

Two gaps in access to credible messengers or mentors include:

- 1.) Not all youth returning to their communities have access to supportive persons, such as credible messengers.
- 2.) Credible messengers are only available to young people for a short period of time following their release and return to their community.

## **Family Support**

Keeping youth connected to their families while in detention and or in a community-based setting is a critical and principal source of a child's primary emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual development. Studies have shown family visits not only reduce recidivism rates for justice-involved youth, but also decreases the rate of siblings' involvement in the justice system. Youth who receive frequent visits from parents while placed in detention have also shown a more rapid reduction in depression symptoms. Visits have also been associated with improved grades and less violent incidents while in placement. Despite the clear benefits, and steps juvenile justice program administrators have taken to integrate family focused models, transportation barriers to and from facilities have prevented families from maintaining positive connections.

Family supports in Connecticut are lacking the following:

- 1.) Families struggle to visit youth in facilities and youth struggle to maintain positive relationships while in a facility due to their support system's inability to access transportation to and from the facility.
- 2.) There is insufficient availability and access to assistance with basic needs and other supports for young people and their families when a young person reenters the community.
- 3.) There is a lack of peer and family support groups in the community to bolster a successful reentry.
- 4.) Family reintegration initiatives fail to incorporate restorative justice practices and principles.

## **Housing**

Studies show a disproportionate number of youth experiencing homelessness will have contact with law enforcement when compared to stably housed youth.<sup>10</sup> Correspondingly, a national study found that 46% of youth who experienced homelessness were also juvenile justice involved, compared to only 15% of the general population. The impact of housing stability has not traditionally been a primary consideration in youth re-entry planning or intervention frameworks for youth who remain in the community pre-trial. Reform efforts have largely focused on reentry services to connect youth with meaningful opportunities for self-sufficiency and community integration. Contact with the juvenile justice system denotes an acute inflection point for advancing prevention objectives and connecting youth as well as their families with housing support. It is essential for intake risk assessments to not only screen for housing stability but also embrace a system of integrity. The delivery of reentry services must be deliberate, screened, available, delivered, and engaged in by youth participants and their families.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://cmjcenter.org/documents/arches\\_findings\\_at\\_a\\_glance.pdf](https://cmjcenter.org/documents/arches_findings_at_a_glance.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://healthandjusticejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40352-022-00177-7>

Washington requires the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection, in coordination with other state offices, to create a rapid response team that supports youth and young adults exiting a publicly funded system of care, including the juvenile court system.<sup>11</sup> No one agency can address the needs of vulnerable young people independently. Justice involved youth returning to the community and their families have diverse and multifaceted needs. For example, families in crisis may need short term or long-term housing support services; whereas youth who are transitioning into adulthood and cannot live with family may need transitional housing support. Solutions necessitate greater coordination and resources from multiple systems and programs at the local, state, and community levels. Legislation in Virginia 2022 requires the state to support children's rent for 6 months.<sup>12</sup>

Challenges in housing for youth returning to the community include:

- 1.) There are almost no housing options for youth under the age of 18 who cannot, should not, or do not want to return to their community.
- 2.) Many families of reentering youth often do not have consistent, sustainable housing.
- 3.) Families who wish to relocate for safety reasons have no access to moving expenses or security deposits for rent.

## **Transportation**

Transportation issues were identified:

- 1.) Very limited transportation options make it incredibly difficult to attend appointments, interviews and/or work, particularly when they are located at multiple sites.

## **Mental Health**

A key priority for juvenile justice systems must be to maintain public safety and to support youth to achieve positive outcomes. To this end, systems must ensure that youth receive high quality treatment and services—a goal that cannot be achieved if youth fundamentally do not feel physically or emotionally safe.

Reentry interventions must consider youths unique life experiences and address the effects of past trauma, fear of stigma, and need to cultivate trusting relationships with adults. Individual and collective trauma have harmed can hinder their ability to stay on or reconnect to an educational and career pathway that leads to economic security.

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders at a disproportionate rate when compared to the general public. During the 2022 calendar year 63.2% of JBCSSD youth admissions assessments indicated mental health concerns. While over half of admitted youth were placed on suicide watch, ten percent of youth were placed on constant observation. Data from Manson Youth shows similar findings, 69% of individuals in custody had a mental health score over two.<sup>13</sup>

Confinement in a juvenile correctional facility and residential placements naturally carries detrimental impacts. alongside all instances in which a young person is separated from their family and community.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ncsl.org/human-services/youth-homelessness-overview>

<sup>12</sup>

[https://custom.statenet.com/public/resources.cgi?id=ID:bill:VA2022000H349&ciq=schererhousing&client\\_md=29e1e8cc50da50187395aaeb8a063ad1&mode=current\\_text](https://custom.statenet.com/public/resources.cgi?id=ID:bill:VA2022000H349&ciq=schererhousing&client_md=29e1e8cc50da50187395aaeb8a063ad1&mode=current_text)

<sup>13</sup>

[https://www.cga.ct.gov/app/tfs/20141215\\_Juvenile%20Justice%20Policy%20and%20Oversight%20Committee/20230420/JJPOC%20April%20Powerpoint%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/app/tfs/20141215_Juvenile%20Justice%20Policy%20and%20Oversight%20Committee/20230420/JJPOC%20April%20Powerpoint%20FINAL.pdf)

There are challenges with access to mental health services throughout the state and it is more severe in reentry. There is a shortage of the following:

- 1.) Family support to get a young person to appointments or remain engaged in treatment programs.
- 2.) Data on the effectiveness of current mental health and substance use disorder prevention services.
- 3.) A warm hand off for youth when they leave facilities and connections to age appropriate (adult) services when they are no longer eligible for services they were receiving as a young person.
- 4.) Care coordination for pretrial and sentenced youth.
- 5.) Follow up on the services youth are receiving when they leave CSSD or DOC facilities.
- 6.) Records provided to DOC on youth mental health and substance use resulting in the young person having to disclose their mental health and/or substance use.

### **Substance Use Disorder Prevention and Treatment**

DCF had a grant that created "RAFT" - where they pilot tested re-entry and family treatment using MDFT model - intensive in-home family therapy for youth SUD and MH (integrated care) at CJTS. Services started 2 months prior to release and continued post-release in the community. CT provides Smart Recovery in several facilities. Smart Recovery created the InsideOut: A SMART Recovery Correctional Program for use in correctional facilities utilizing alternative peer groups that will assist youth with their reentry. SMART also has opportunities for families to heal in recovery together through their CRAFT model. DCF funds these programs from SAMHSA in partnership with DMHAS. Facilities can utilize SAMHSA's screening tool SBIRT to determine substance use concerns.<sup>14</sup> Pheonix Recovery is another organization working with youth on reentry and sustaining in the community.<sup>15</sup>

What kind of substance use disorder prevention services are needed for youth reentering (e.g., peer support groups, medication, assisted treatment)? Any recommendation from DOC?

### **RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>16</sup>**

Structural investments are needed to reduce current recidivism trends. We cannot expect youth to simply pick up where they left off before confinement and succeed. Youth returning home from both detention and other residential placements deserve comprehensive supports when reintegrating back into their communities. Guidance and structured programming are especially important for youth exiting secure placement. Like non-justice-involved youth, justice involved youth have aspirations, strengths, assets and, make positive contributions to our communities just like their peers.

Modeled practices show the best juvenile prevention systems provide comprehensive programing that not only reduces risk but also includes protective elements in the community, education systems, and in the lives of both youth and their families. The presented re-entry framework offers promising and practical solutions to meet the evolving needs of young people reentering the community.

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<sup>14</sup> Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) | SAMHSA

<sup>15</sup> Building a Sober Active Community - Who We Are - The Phoenix

<sup>16</sup> <https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/second-chance-act/program-tracks/youth-offender-reentry-program>

This framework primarily works to (1) foster positive youth outcomes, (2) improve public safety, and (3) reduce juvenile justice interaction by developing comprehensive continuum of community-based interventions—strengthening re-entry coordination and service capacity.

The following interventions promote youth led hope, empowerment and resiliency in justice involved youth's present situation as well as their future. The following are recommendations to address the gaps identified by the subgroup. Each recommendation includes input from systems-impacted youth.

### **Recommendation #1: Coordinate and Expand Reentry Supports for Connecticut's Youth**

*Include what the youth surveys sated about the need/solution*

What Connecticut's youth will benefit from is a communicated and coordinated effort among state agencies and subsequently community providers, to assess and address their needs, beginning immediately upon a youth's admission to a facility – a Coordinating entity. This will establish one central care coordination for youth. Connecticut should expand several reentry strategies and services that already exist; specifically, reintegration mentors, school reentry coordinators, LYNC, and reentry welcome centers/ roundtables to facilitate access to services and supports. Connecticut needs a coordinated system for reentry services that already exist. The entity responsible for coordination may be through creating a new welcome center for youth, patterned after the current adult welcome centers, or through a new hub model similar to that in other states.

Central coordination of services is essential for pulling together a multi-system approach to connect youth efficiently and holistically to all their varying individually identified needs. Services that shall be centrally coordinated upon admission shall include but are not limited to: mental health services; substance use disorders treatment and recovery; education support; employment support; housing support; financial literacy and debt support services; life skills support services; social services support; family involvement, inclusion, and healing; transition supports; and preventative mentoring services. The coordinating entity, agencies, and providers involved in reentry planning and implementation should incorporate a restorative recovery approach to their work through receiving a training on and/or understanding stigma and implicit bias surrounding youth involved in the legal system and by identifying youth using person first language.

### **Recommendation #2: Improve Education Transition Planning and Access to Education Support Services**

*\*14 out of 38 youth had a goal for themselves one year from now to still be in school, closer to graduation, or in college*

*\*22 out of 37 youth stated that successful reentry into the community looked like “attending school”; 4 additional youth stated “participating in sports”*

Education and school attendance are normal developmental milestones for youth and can serve as important protective factors against delinquency and involvement in the juvenile justice system.<sup>17</sup> Education

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<sup>17</sup> Development Services Group, 2015c

plays a critical role in the successful reentry of a young person into his or her community.<sup>18</sup> Engagement in prosocial institutions, like education, is critical in interrupting the cycle of offending for youth as they emerge from their adolescents to adulthood.

The following are the proposed solutions:

1. Improve communication and information sharing between facility education providers, the DCF Juvenile Justice Education Unit (JJEU) personnel, and school district reentry coordinators.
2. The DCF JJEU will assist the parent/legal guardian of each student to have a planning and placement team (PPT) meeting with the facility education provider and school district to develop the education transition/reentry plan.
3. The returning school district should receive updates every other week from JJEU on the student as soon as the student and legal guardian and school district have agreed upon the plan.
4. The DCF JJEU will work with facility education providers and school districts to assure that education credit earned in the facility is applied to the student's transcript at the school district.
5. If a young person is put on house arrest following their stay in a facility or experiences environmental challenges that create barriers to them returning to school, this shall be communicated to JJEU by JBCSSD, and JJEU will facilitate conversations with the school district regarding essential educational services.
6. Educational Support Services (ESS) contracts that CSSD has with community programs in New Haven needs to be expanded so more youth who are pretrial or on probation have access to educational advocates and youth who are released from secure and step-down facilities (DOC and JBCSSD) also have access to educational advocates.

### **Recommendation #3: Provide Access to Meaningful Vocational and Employment Opportunities**

*\*25 out of 38 youth stated they did not have a job before entering detention or REGIONS; 3 youth stated they did have a job but could not keep the job; 5 youth had a job and could keep the job;*

*\*In response to the question: What would you need at a job to be successful, the majority of the responses identify support, guidance, and positivity*

*\*22 out of 38 youth stated that their goal for themselves one year from now was to have a job or pursue a career.*

Vocational support is another critical component of successful reentry. Connecticut must ensure workforce development opportunities are available to youth at all points of the youth justice systems, as an alternative to system involvement, a diversion norm, while on probation, pre-trial, while in placement, supervision, post-release and even as an alternative to residential placement or confinement. The federally funded workforce-development system offers resourceful pathways to support youth increase their chances of success and become economically self-sufficient.

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<sup>18</sup> Bilchik, 2014

Connecticut's American Job Centers are available to all jobseekers and businesses in the state and could be accessible or affiliate "hubs" for justice involved youth, provided resources were available to provide capacity and infrastructure within that system to better and more fully serve justice involved youth.

1. Youth shall be provided job search and engagement support; as well as the opportunity to hold paid positions either in or outside of the facility prior to release.
2. Connect all youth to a workforce alignment pathway prior to release.
3. Collaboration with the DOL, workforce partners, and technical schools to provide vocational opportunities to young people returning to their communities.

#### **Recommendations #4: Increase and Expand the use of Restorative Justice**

*\*In response to what successful reentry in community looks like, one youth responded, "I think I'll be successful because it's quiet in the streets right now because a lot of people are locked up. I feel safer that they are locked up."*

*\*"Developing a better relationship with my mom and engaging in things to help me mentally and emotionally. Having different option to handle potential arguments"*

##### *Restorative Justice ...*

Youth may benefit from story telling training. Restorative Justice Alliance provides this work to the community – teaching youth how to confidently share about their life and who they are. Developing confidence and understanding of oneself helps a young person rid themselves of associating with any negative stigmas and judgments. Additionally, both JBCSSD and DOC conduct restorative justice circles in some of their facilities.

1. There needs to be a restorative justice Implementation Plan at the central office of DOC and JBCSSD and in each facility. The restorative justice implementation plan must be implemented at each facility DOC and JBCSSD operates to serve young people under the age of 18 years old.
2. LYNC and other community-based providers need to implement restorative justice principles and practices.
3. Every returning school district will hold a reentry circle with a returning young person prior to their first day back at school, to help integrate and provide wrap around support and inclusion for the young person. Each school district will be equipped with the expectations of a reentry circle. Reentry circles at school may include but are not limited to: school counselor, principal, teacher, students, family, re-entry hub coordinator, credible messenger, and SRO. Reentry circles should follow RJ practices and create a safe place for healing between a young person and their school community.

#### **Recommendation #5: Expand Access to Credible Messengers, Reintegration Mentors, and Reentry Navigators**

*\*12 out of 38 youth stated they needed a credible messenger/mentor to successfully return to their community*

*\*24 out of 38 youth stated “friends”, “community”, “lifestyle”, and “the streets” were potential barriers to their reentry*

*\*17 out of 38 youth identified a mentor or credible messenger to be the most helpful to them*

Mentors are vital for young people returning to their communities and are given multiple names by systems and providers. JBCSSD utilizes reintegration mentors who...and credible messengers who ... DOC utilizes Behind the Wall Navigators who...

1. Every youth both pre-trial and adjudicated at either DOC or JBCSSD shall have the opportunity to be connected to a credible messenger.
2. DOC and JBCSSD Credible messenger contracts need to expand to include pretrial and post adjudication youth as well as 15–17-year-olds at DOC.
3. Credible Messenger programs should receive funding necessary to expand their services to serve all interested youth and eliminate waitlists, provide adequate wages for credible messengers to deter turnover and promote continuum of care for youth, and expand credible messenger contracts to allow mentors to follow youth for at a minimum 18 months upon release.

#### **Recommendation #6: Increase and Expand the Types of Transition Support**

*\*13 out of 38 youth identified their grandparents as the relationship that mattered most to them and most important to them when they get out*

*\*3 youth identified that a relationship with their own children was the one that mattered most to them*

*\*“I feel that my family has already stepped up to help me. I feel my mentor can be more active in my life and my PO can be more helpful. My family is most important to me but we can use help communicating.” – Youth Response*

*\*“I grew up with my mom; she is the most important to me. I need my mom to get her own therapy too, she lets things get to her and then it makes me upset” – Youth Response*

DCF formerly had a program called Fostering responsibility, education and employment for youth. This program assisted youth while detained and supported them and their family with reentry and reducing recidivism. DOC currently provides transition supports through their Young Men’s Group, Re-entry Group, and Behind the Wall Navigators. JBCSSD currently provides transition supports through their reintegration mentors, MST-FT, PBS family survey, family support specialist, LYNC, and Discharge Circles.

1. Creation of a reentry wallet or electronic portfolio. The reentry wallet requires communication and data sharing between state agencies identified coordinated entity in Recommendation 1.



Documents that should be provided by state agencies to be kept in the reentry wallet should at a minimum include: school transcripts, immunization records, birth certificate, driver's license or state ID, program certificates earned, vocational achievements, and resourceful phone numbers youth should maintain.

2. When a youth is admitted to a facility, the Coordinating entity connects with the young person's identified support at home and shall provide up to two people, with access to bus passes, mileage reimbursement opportunities, and transportation assistance to visit the young person at the facility, at a minimum, bi-weekly. DOC and JBCSSD shall provide access to virtual visitation for all youth multiple times a week.
3. The Coordinating entity shall ask a youth if they are interested in being connected to an already established peer mentor program in the community, that will connect a detained or incarcerated young person with a peer in the community that can begin visiting them while they are incarcerated. This peer could be paired with a credible messenger to train them in ways to support the young person during reentry.
4. DOC and JBCSSD shall receive and utilize FLEX funding to cover family services and basic needs for up to 6 months following a youth's return to the community. This may include covering housing costs and similar financial responsibilities.
5. The Coordinating entity shall offer to connect the family of young person in DOC or JBCSSD facilities to a Kinship navigator program and family support programs.
6. There needs to be local peer community support groups established through partnership of the Re-entry Hub with local/regional youth serving organizations for youth to meet with other youth also going through reentry. This could be modeled after the adult serving reentry welcome centers and reentry roundtables in Connecticut.

### **Recommendation #7: Expand Access to Housing Options**

*\*In response to a question about barriers to successful reentry one youth replied, "If my family isn't being taken care of, I feel like it's my job to do that for them and I forget about what bad things could happen to me as long as my family is okay"*

JBCSSD conducts a housing screen for youth upon admission to pretrial detention and by probation. DOC has also recently piloted a housing screen. JBCSSD has contracted with CJR to open the first youth transitional living program in Wethersfield, CT. The facility...

1. DOC and JBCSSD shall institute screening on housing needs upon admission to a facility.
2. JBCSSD shall expand their transitional living facility program to allow for more youth to live independently.
3. DOH should expand access and housing waivers for young people leaving a DOC or JBCSSD facility.
4. DOC and JBCSSD FLEX funds should be expanded to provide a young person and their family the ability to relocate.

### **Recommendation #8: Address Barriers to Transportation**

Transportation is a key component of successful reentry as it poses one of the greatest barriers to accessing services upon release.

1. The Coordinating entity shall provide a young person with assistance getting to interviews, work, and appointments for up to a year.
2. The Coordinating entity may utilize FLEX funds to support Uber/Lyft costs; mileage reimbursement for anyone providing transportation to the young person, to include mentors, family, and friends; bus passes, and any other approved method of transportation to assist a young person in the above-mentioned responsibilities.
3. DOC and JBCSSD shall, in partnership with DMV assist and provide youth with the opportunity to take driving courses and obtain their permit and driver's license prior to release and into reentry.
4. Facility staff can help youth and their families seek car insurance prior to release and into reentry.
5. Services and supports can be co-located in one place to eliminate the need to go to multiple sites

#### **Recommendation #9: for Mental Health Gaps**

*\*16 out of 39 youth stated they want mental health counseling when they return to the community.*

Research has long shown that the vast majority of youth referred to the juvenile justice system have witnessed traumatic events, experienced significant deprivation, have mental health treatment needs or suffered individual victimization.

1. A youth's treatment provider prior to the youth's entry into the facility should be allowed to continue treatment while the youth is in the facility. A fee structure may need to be developed to allow payment for this type/level of service.
2. Mental health community service providers should be connected with youth and families prior to the youth's release to begin the engagement process and ensure a warm hand-off to the community service provide. When deemed acceptable by the facility, a young person shall have the opportunity to see their provider out in the community.
3. DOC and JBCSSD shall expand their care coordination system to account for the new federal changes to Medicaid which allow for expanded services.
4. The Coordinating entity shall convene a multi-agency team for each youth, to meet at least monthly, if not more, to implement the reentry plan. Agencies involved may include: JBCSSD and/or DOC, DOH, CSDE, JJEU, DMHAS-YAS, DOL, DSS, and DCF. DCF shall have a liaison from the Behavioral Health division to include those with expertise in mental health, substance use, intimate partner violence, and recovery.

#### **Recommendation #10: Expand Access to Substance Use Treatment and Recovery Supports**

1. Connect young people to substance use treatment and recovery support systems prior to release

## OPERATIONALIZATION OF REENTRY SUCCESS PLAN COMPONENTS

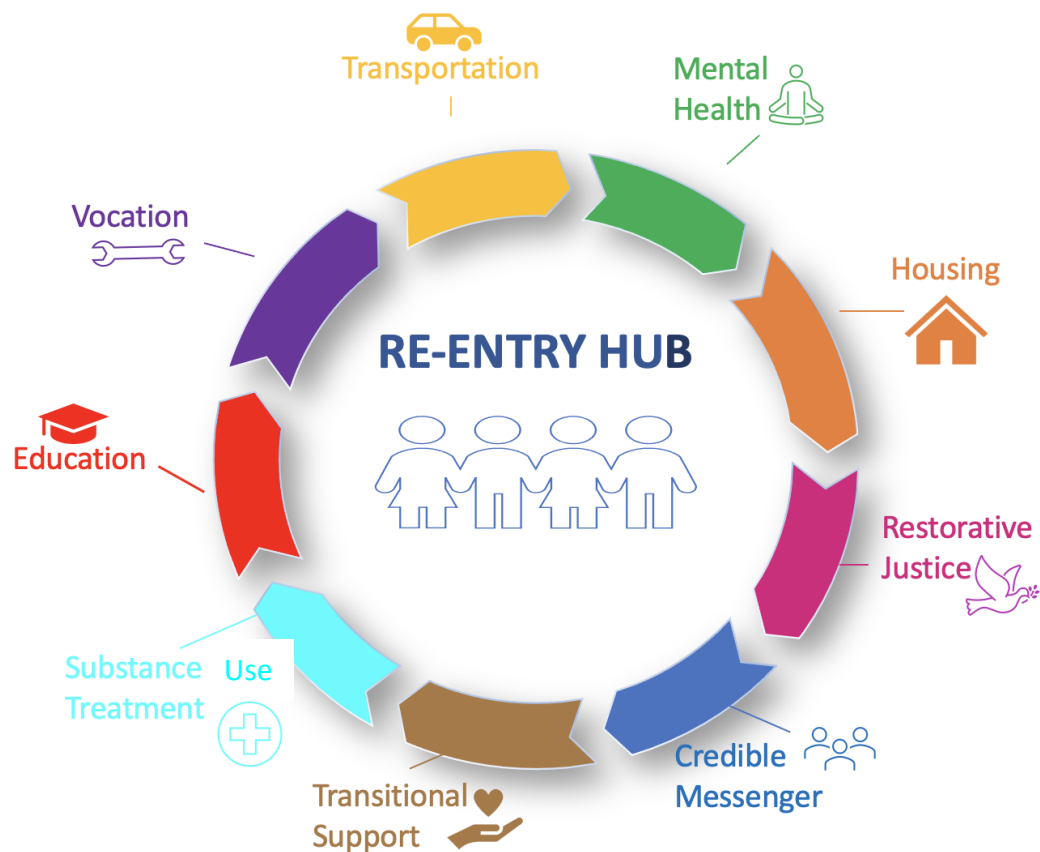
### Quality Assurance Framework

The quality assurance framework will identify key performance indicators in which goals are mapped out and a strategy is developed on how to achieve them. DOC and JBCSSD will conduct a longitudinal analysis on outcomes of current programs offered at youth facilities to determine effectiveness.

### Funding

Add comments about funding opportunities? Comments regarding how much funding is needed for each recommendation?

### CT Reentry Flow Chart



The Coordinating entity will be required to assess and address, at a minimum, 9 identified components: Education, Vocation, Restorative Justice, Credible Messengers, Transition Supports, Housing, Transportation, Mental Health, and Substance Use.