

Programming for Older Youth in Juvenile Justice Facilities

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Workgroup Members

Lead Researcher and Author: Sharon Pette, Effective System Innovations LLC

<https://www.rapidesi.com/>

Natalie Walker (CJJA)

Kevin Shepherd (CJJA)

Wendi Davis (CJJA)

Mike Dempsey (CJJA)

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Introduction

In the past few decades, emerging research has led juvenile justice professionals to shift their approach when working with young people. Scientific studies now show that cognitive reasoning is not fully developed until later in life. Neuroscientists generally agree that brain development occurs through the mid-20s and, possibly, even into the 30s.¹ With this understanding, state agencies and advocacy groups have lobbied to raise the age at which youth may be tried and convicted as an adult. In addition, states have increased the age at which youth may remain in the custody of a juvenile justice agency. For example, in May 2021, Utah enacted House Bill 1002, which

provided that all youth awaiting adjudication on an adult charge (whether through transfer or direct file) will be housed in a juvenile facility, up to the age of 21. In addition, all youth adjudicated as adults who are given prison sentences, will be housed in a juvenile facility up to age 21.²

Other state juvenile justice agencies, such as the Oregon Youth Authority, can legally house young people in a juvenile facility until they are 25 years old.³

Many juvenile justice practitioners understand that using research-supported practices with youth may include retaining supervision of youth until they are emotionally, cognitively, and physically mature enough to be housed among adults. However, this understanding and practice pose a unique set of challenges for juvenile justice facilities. One overarching challenge is how to serve a wide range of youth—sometimes spanning 11 to 25 years old—in a small or medium-sized facility while also ensuring the provision of treatment to address individual youth needs. If the goal of juvenile justice interventions is to improve outcomes for youth (i.e., increase protective factors and decrease the likelihood of committing future crimes), it is imperative that practitioners implement interventions and programming that are effective with older youth.

This white paper focuses on programming for youth ages 17 and older residing in secure custody settings. The purpose is to provide the audience with program-related resources for working with these youth and introduce potential funding resources for age-appropriate programming. This white paper also intends to bring to the forefront the shared challenges that juvenile justice facilities face when serving older individuals and offers feasible solutions to these challenges. It is the hope of the Center for Coordinated Assistance to States and its partner that readers will consider the innovative practices offered in this document when working with older youth. Finally, this white paper provides policy, practice, and legislative considerations that may warrant future exploration by juvenile justice professionals and policymakers.

For this white paper, we broadly define “programming” as any scheduled activity, curriculum, or service provided to individuals residing in a juvenile justice facility that aims to treat and improve an individual’s well-being.

Multiple quotations and citations appear throughout this white paper. It is important to recognize that in addition to the publications noted, information was obtained directly from 16 juvenile justice administrators who participated in a 1-hour discussion about programming for older youth in secure facility settings. The information and insights these individuals provided was instrumental when developing this white paper.

Programming and Promoting Peer Leadership

Consistent with best practices, most juvenile justice facilities use a standardized assessment to identify individual risk and need factors during the intake process. Most facilities also provide cognitive-based and trauma-informed treatment groups because research shows that these treatment modalities have the greatest impact on youth outcomes. Although the items on a standardized and validated risk needs assessment should not be modified, treatment groups may be slightly modified to better serve the intended population. Treatment modifications may include using age-appropriate and culturally specific examples when explaining treatment concepts and teaching new skills. Slight modifications to the curriculum are permitted, but it is important that juvenile justice practitioners understand the importance of maintaining treatment fidelity (implementing the model as designed) because treatment fidelity has a significant impact on youth outcomes. For more information about the importance of treatment fidelity, refer to [Outcome Evaluation of Washington State’s Research-Based Programs for Juvenile Offenders](#) from the Washington State Institute of Public Policy.⁴ Practitioners are encouraged to consult with the model and/or curriculum authors to determine the degree to which a curriculum can be modified without jeopardizing treatment integrity and subsequent outcomes.

Most juvenile justice facilities use a behavior management or incentive system to encourage prosocial behaviors and further engagement in treatment. Although a behavior management system (BMS) often has several levels, it is common for longer term youth to achieve the highest phase of the facility’s BMS and remain at this status for years. Consequently, older youth who have “maxed out” in the BMS have little or no tangible incentives to continue positive behaviors. Juvenile justice professionals often witness longer term youth sabotaging their high-level status out of boredom and/or because youth feel restricted in a juvenile justice facility and decide they would rather be in an adult facility. With this understanding, facilities must implement a behavior incentive system that provides rewards to motivate older youth to stay engaged in programming and treatment. Although the behavior system must be fair and consistent across youth, incentives should be meaningful and age appropriate. Juvenile justice

Examples of Incentives for Older Youth

- Personal clothing and/or wearing different clothing options
- Later bedtimes
- Opportunities to earn money when conducting appropriate duties in the living unit
- Serving as peer mentors
- Access to postsecondary education or vocational certificate programs
- Serving in a student government capacity
- Opportunities to live in a semi-independent living unit

professionals are encouraged to gather information from older youth regarding which types of incentives would be meaningful to them and assist youth in remaining engaged in the program.

Another programming adaptation that may be useful when working with older youth is providing leadership opportunities for young adults who consistently demonstrate emotional maturity and behavioral stability. For example, facilities may foster leadership skills in older youth by doing the following:

- Encouraging youth to lead a weekly community group (with staff supervision)
- Leading a book club
- Teaching youth and staff a hobby (e.g., guitar, meditation, drawing)
- Encouraging youth to share personal examples during treatment group sessions (e.g., how they struggled in the past; how they demonstrated a prosocial skill they were taught to overcome a challenging situation)
- Actively engaging youth in treatment reviews and in the development of their personal goals
- Performing independent living tasks (e.g., laundry, meal preparation, financial literacy)
- Assisting with staff training (e.g., an overview of youth programming or the behavioral level system)
- Assisting with facility tours
- Allowing youth who have completed their high school education to act as peer tutors to younger youth

Although these activities are seemingly small additions, they serve as opportunities to develop and practice leadership skills. Serving as a role model can have a positive impact on a youth's feelings of worthiness, sense of belonging, and connection to peers. Ultimately, honing leadership skills in young adults can significantly and positively influence their future lives—personally and professionally.

Formal peer mentoring programs, when implemented properly, can be greatly beneficial to younger youth and youth who are new to a secure custody setting. When designing a peer mentoring program in which an older youth is assigned to younger or new youth, juvenile justice professionals should consider the following structural components:

- Establish clear and structured eligibility criteria for becoming a peer mentor (e.g., consistently demonstrating emotional maturity and behavior stability; a commitment to their individual treatment goals; a willingness to help others succeed).
- Create a structured process that requires potential mentors to complete an application and participate in a formal interview process. This process also will provide an opportunity for youth to practice job readiness skills.
- Provide formal training on mentoring expectations. It is important to remind staff and peer mentors that peer mentors are not junior staff members. In other words, peer mentors do not have any governing authority over mentees and cannot issue consequences. The role of a peer mentor is to help support other youth in achieving their goals while in the juvenile justice facility.

- Have a structured process to support peer mentors as they grow into their mentoring role and develop new skills. This process may involve convening routine meetings or huddles with peer mentors to highlight successes, work through challenges, provide constructive feedback, and discuss approaches for working with specific youth.
- Establish a monitoring structure to ensure that peer mentors meet the agreed-on expectations. This structure should include a process for providing feedback to mentors and supporting mentors in growing their new skills.

For additional assistance, consult the [Check & Connect Online Mentoring Guide](#). This guide may be adapted and applied to secure juvenile justice settings.

A well-established peer mentoring program can provide numerous benefits to both the mentee and the mentor. In this working relationship, the mentee benefits from the guidance and support from their peers, which, in turn, may decrease anxiety, improve social skills, increase engagement in treatment, increase self-confidence, and strengthen the overall sense of community in the facility. As a peer mentor, young adults have an opportunity to learn how to effectively interact with a range of individual personalities, how to support others on their path to success, provide tools and strategies for increasing motivation in others, and how to be a leader. Ultimately, effective peer mentoring programs can reinforce the peer mentor's and mentee's commitment to the program and their own success.

Research also has shown the positive impact of credible messenger programs.⁵ The [Credible Messenger Justice Center](#) explains “credible messenger” programs and the impact they can have:

Credible Messengers are mentors who have passed through the justice system and sustainably transformed their lives. Often Returned Citizens (previously incarcerated) and others with similarly relevant experiences, want to give back to help others. Their life experience provides them with a special ability to connect with younger, justice-involved people.

From the same background and speaking the same language, Credible Messengers are able to break through to these individuals and form powerful, transformative, personal relationships. With the development of trust over time, they provide these young people a living example of hope and opportunity and are able to equip them with new tools to manage their emotions and behavior and thus change their lives.⁶

Credible messenger programs may be especially beneficial for older facility youth who will be transitioning back into the community. One example of a credible messenger program is the Arches Transformative Mentoring Program, based in New York City. This program serves young people ages 16 to 24 who are on probation. The results from a formal evaluation study were deemed promising. The study found that combining an evidence-

based curriculum and credible messenger mentoring was promising in reducing recidivism.⁷ More specifically, results revealed that the Arches Transformative Mentoring Program

reduces one-year felony reconviction by over two-thirds and reduces two-year felony reconviction by over half. [In addition,] . . . pre- and post-assessment show gains in key attitudinal and behavioral indicators, including emotion regulation and future orientation. Qualitative findings show that participants report very close and supportive relationships with mentors, attributed to mentors' status as credible messengers, their 24/7 availability for one-on-one mentoring, and a "family atmosphere" within the program.⁷

Although this program is aimed at a probation population, juvenile justice facilities should consider implementing a credible messenger program, particularly for older youth who will transition back into the community. Establishing healthy support networks while youth are still in a secure facility setting will increase the likelihood of youth success because credible messengers can offer real-life guidance and tips for remaining successful after release. Readers are encouraged to consult the Credible Messenger Justice Center [website](#) to gather more information on this topic.

Education and Vocation

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) "is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children."⁸ This act applies to students charged with or adjudicated of a crime and upholds their right to an appropriate education. Many juvenile justice youth have struggled with academics prior to entering an institutional setting. Research shows that

many youth who encounter the juvenile justice system have experienced academic failure, disengagement from school, and/or school disciplinary challenges. . . . Nearly half of all students who enter residential juvenile justice facilities have an academic achievement level that is below the grade equivalent for their age.⁹

In addition, juvenile justice youth "are identified as eligible for special education services at three to seven times the rate of youth outside the system."⁹ According to the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice, a large portion of these youth are identified as having a disability, yet less than half report that they are receiving special education services.¹⁰ Thus, it is imperative that facility educators conduct specialized education assessments to properly determine grade levels and diagnose special education needs. Identifying youth needs is critical, particularly if

"Institutional education plays a critical role in reducing recidivism and increasing post-release success for youth in correctional facilities. Because education is so important, correctional facilities that are administering programs using Title I, Part D funds must ensure that youth who are incarcerated have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) with the same opportunities as youth who are not in secure settings."¹¹

these needs rise to the level of a formal special education diagnosis. Accurately assessing and diagnosing youth opens up funding for education and vocational services for youth residing in a correctional setting. Agencies are encouraged to explore funding sources, such as Title I, Part D (TIPD), to supplement existing programs. Further discussion on funding opportunities and considerations appears later in this document.

Additional Opportunities for Youth With Qualifying Diagnoses

Juvenile justice agencies often experience challenges with accessing funding for education and vocational resources once a youth reaches 18 years old. However, youth who have been appropriately evaluated and identified as having specific clinical diagnoses may be eligible to receive vocational and training funding through age 21 and sometimes (based on the grant regulations) beyond age 21. Some of the most common qualifying disabilities among juvenile justice youth are as follows¹²:

- **Specific Learning Disability:** Students typically have average intelligence but process information differently, which often results in learning challenges in reading, writing, mathematics, listening, speaking, or reasoning.
- **Emotional or Behavioral Disorder:** Students typically are unable to create or maintain healthy relationships, they display inappropriate behaviors, or experience general unhappiness or depression that interferes with their learning. Students might be diagnosed as having one or more of the following disorders: anxiety, bipolar disorder, conduct disorder, eating disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and psychotic disorders.
- **Intellectual Disability:** Students have below-average intelligence, in conjunction with deficits in daily living, communication, and social skills, which can affect learning and other developmental areas (e.g., movement, language).
- **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder:** Students typically display inattentive, hyperactive, or impulsive behaviors. More specifically, they have difficulty focusing, following directions, completing assignments or projects, taking turns, waiting, or sitting still.

Juvenile justice professionals are encouraged to explore additional resources for working with youth with disabilities in a secure juvenile justice setting. One valuable resource to consider is [Improving Outcomes for Youth With Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections](#), a toolkit that details “evidence and research-based practices, tools, and resources that educators, families, facilities, and community agencies can use to better support and improve the long-term outcomes for youth with disabilities in juvenile correctional facilities.”¹⁰

Educational degrees, vocational certifications, and job skills are powerful factors that can influence the likelihood to recidivate. Thus, it is important that juvenile justice professionals employ strategies to motivate young adults to consistently attend school and earn a GED (General Educational Development), a high school diploma, and/or vocational certifications while in a secure facility. In addition, it is important that disciplinary practices that remove youth from the classroom be used only as a last resort (i.e., for significant safety reasons). Therefore, it is important that staff receive training in motivational interviewing and problem-solving techniques to ensure that youth of all ages remain consistently engaged in the education and vocational programs offered.

Providing advanced learning opportunities has a powerful influence on youth success. Offering youth the opportunity to pursue college degrees by completing online college classes through a self-contained system such

as [RACHEL](#) can open doors for youth that would otherwise be closed. Many jurisdictions also have successfully recruited local colleges, community colleges, and vocational centers to conduct in-person classes for young adults inside the juvenile justice facility. To facilitate access to higher education opportunities, juvenile justice agencies may consider identifying an individual responsible for assisting youth in applying for financial aid. It is imperative that agency education or vocation coordinators understand and fully explain the

RACHEL (Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning) is an education portal that enables users to access educational websites without the internet. RACHEL operates by delivering wireless digital education content to nearby laptops, tablets, or smartphones. This secure educational system and similar education portals have been implemented in juvenile justice facilities throughout the United States and in more than 50 countries. Using RACHEL allows educators to provide important learning content to youth confined in secure settings in a safe and healthy learning environment. For more information, please explore World Possible's RACHEL Server.

ramifications of applying for and receiving financial aid awards. Finally, it is important that these coordinators work closely with their state partners (e.g., departments of education, higher education, employment, or child welfare) to ensure that local districts and employers accept the credits that youth earn while in a secure facility.

Assessing youth educational and vocational needs at intake, and at regular intervals throughout their stay, is an essential element to programming for youth in facilities. Information derived from assessments must be included in formal case plans and be part of youth transition goals. The Vanderbilt Peabody College IRIS Center highlights three key components to consider when programming for older youth: vocation/job training, job preparation/readiness skills, and “soft skills” training.¹³ The term “soft skills” can be explained as

non-technical personal skills useful for helping an individual to secure and maintain employment. Soft skills include problem-solving and critical thinking, time-management, communication skills, the ability to work well with others, and the importance of projecting a positive attitude in the workplace.¹³

These skills also may include teaching youth work ethics and conflict resolution. According to the IRIS Center, job training for youth in the juvenile justice system should include

those skills specific to the type of employment the youth wishes to pursue (e.g., welding, nursing), as well as skills related to obtaining a job (e.g., filling out an application, taking part in a job interview).

Furthermore, youth will require instruction in some of the “soft skills” related to employment—problem-solving, teamwork, effective communication, interpersonal skills, reliability, and responsibility, among others.¹³

Youth also may benefit from understanding budgeting, banking, and credit scores. Agencies should adopt formal curricula, policies, and practices to ensure that the three key elements—vocation/job training, job preparation/readiness skills, and soft skills training—are offered to the appropriate youth. It is important to note that “appropriate youth” may include youth who are younger than age 17 because many of these youth wish to obtain a job after release.¹⁴

Best practices include providing opportunities for older youth to obtain vocational credits, certifications, and work experience while in secure custody. Interviews with juvenile justice agency directors from 16 jurisdictions across the county provided numerous examples of vocational programming and work experience offered. A comprehensive list of these services follows for reference and consideration.

Vocational Programming Opportunities Currently Provided by Juvenile Justice Agencies

- Audio/video production
- Administrative skills and tasks
- Agricultural science
- Automotive—bodywork/painting
- Automotive—small engine repair
- Barbering
- Bicycle repair
- Certified nursing assistant
- Certified recovery mentor (substance abuse program)
- Coding and other computer skills
- Coffee barista training
- Computer aided design
- Construction and flagging (e.g., Occupational Safety and Health Administration online classes, ANEW—Construction pre-apprenticeship program)
- Cosmetology
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid
- Culinary arts program
- Entrepreneurial skills—planning for, starting, and operating a business
- Environmental specialist
- Fiber optics, copper wiring, and telecommunications
- Financial literacy and bank teller skills
- Forklift operation (hands-on training or computer simulation)
- Gardening and landscaping
- Manufacturing academy (manufacturing industry)
- Maritime industry
- Personal fitness training (International Sports Sciences Association certification)
- Podcasting
- Professional painting
- Restoration of salvaged furniture/equipment (upholstery program)
- Security guard certification
- ServSafe (food handling)
- Commercial driver’s license simulator program
- Welding
- Wildland fire fighting
- Woodworking

In addition to these vocational and job readiness programs, many jurisdictions have adopted other innovative programming for older youth. Some examples include the following:

- Showcasing a youth’s work experience as an “internship” to enhance a young person’s résumé (which includes providing youth with proper supervision and coaching). This activity may involve agencies formally requesting that certification bodies accept work performed while in custody as qualifying for total internship hours. This activity should be done prior to youth engaging in the work experience because it may be in the best interest of the youth to pursue other internship paths (those that would result in credit for hours worked) if the agency’s request is denied.
- Creating an “honor” unit within the facility for older youth whose behaviors are stable and who have earned this privilege. Youth are under constant supervision but are afforded privileges, such as having a greater voice in planning their day, having personal clothing, having more frequent access to their rooms, doing their own laundry, and having access to coffee and other food items (i.e., fast food).
- Implementing a parenting program for those who are pregnant or will be parenting. Teaching these skills can have a powerful influence on breaking the negative cycle of learned behaviors and can assist young parents in developing the skills necessary to raise a child.
- Providing a designated individual at each facility whose specialized role is to work with youth who will transition to the adult system.
- Organizing facility-wide recreation activities based on age (e.g., basketball tournament).
- Bringing in law students from a local college to teach youth about criminal law.
- Inviting community members to teach classes on public speaking and leadership skill development.
- Partnering with outside agencies such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or connecting with an existing structured program (e.g., [Project POOCH in Oregon](#)) to involve youth in training dogs to socialize with humans and other dogs. Through structured training sessions, youth can provide dogs with the skills they need to be adopted into a loving family. Allowing youth to connect with animals can be healing for youth in confined settings and life changing for the dogs in their care.

“Project POOCH, quite simply, changes lives. We operate a kennel inside a youth correctional facility and pair currently incarcerated youth with shelter dogs. The youth learn kennel management, positive reinforcement, grooming, and training techniques. The youth learn what it means to be depended on by another living creature and what it means to be trusted and relied upon. And, they learn what unconditional love feels like—sometimes for the first time. Our dogs get trained, loved, and adopted into their forever homes. There is no limit to the amount of time a dog spends in our care, and we are focused on the individual needs of each dog.”¹⁵

Transition Planning

Research supports the idea that effective prerelease transition planning and programming have a tremendous impact on youth success (i.e., outcomes). One research study found that at “a 12-month follow-up, youth with disabilities who received appropriate transition services, including educational supports, were three times more

likely to have remained in the community without further involvement with the justice system.”¹⁶ In addition, “An Arizona State University study found that youth with disabilities who received enhanced transition services, which included the use of transition portfolios, were 64% less likely to recidivate.”¹⁷ Therefore, effective transition planning is of the utmost importance for juvenile justice youth, particularly older youth for whom consequences for reoffending are far greater than for youth under 18 years old. For this reason, some juvenile justice agencies have dedicated staff (i.e., a transition/reentry coordinator) who assists youth with job placement and/or continuation of youth education goals after release into the community. Jurisdictions should consider prioritizing resources to create this position in an effort to increase a youth’s likelihood of success.

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded three model demonstration projects to research strategies for reducing recidivism and promoting the successful reentry of students with disabilities from juvenile correctional facilities into education, employment, and community programs.¹⁸

Each model is unique, although they have five characteristics in common: “create a formal transition team, establish quick records transfer, create a transition plan, utilize evidence-based practices, [and] monitor the transition process.”¹⁸ IDEA requires that youth with disabilities have

a transition plan in place by the time they turn 16 (or as early as 14 in some states or if the IEP team deems it necessary). This plan is called an individualized transition plan (ITP) and is a part of their individualized education program (IEP). The youth’s transition goals related to release to the community from the JC [juvenile correctional] setting should be incorporated into the existing ITP.¹⁴

“A successful transition plan incorporates ongoing, comprehensive assessments of the incarcerated youth’s interests, progress, and challenges. As the youth moves toward the attainment of his or her goals, the transition plan should be adjusted to encourage continued progress. To ensure that this happens, the transition team should meet on a regular basis throughout the duration of the youth’s stay at the JC facility. Because no one person can meet all of a youth’s needs, collaboration and communication are essential elements of effective transition planning. The transition process should also be regularly monitored, and the data should be used to make decisions about what is working and what might need to be revised.”¹³

IRIS provides key principles that should be reflected in transition plans and subsequent service provision. These principles for effective transition planning and services are “(a) youth-driven, strength-based services, (b) flexible educational placement options, (c) competitive employment opportunities, (d) targeted social skills training, and (e) immediate access to community-based services based on youth needs.”¹⁸ Because successful transition greatly influences outcomes, it is critical that agencies set clear expectations (e.g., verbally, policies/procedures, user manuals) and implement quality control measures related to transition. Quality assurance measures may include using a transition checklist to ensure that all required areas are met; periodic audits to assess the quality of transition plans (e.g., whether transition goals are closely aligned with youth identified needs and skills; progress is properly tracked); and data reports (e.g., timeliness of transition plan completion; plan reviews; family

engagement sessions). Data from quality assurance measures should be used to address deficiencies in a timely manner.

Additional policy and practice considerations related to transition planning, particularly for older youth, include the following:

- Transition/reentry planning should begin at intake. Transition goals should be developed based on information from formal assessments, family feedback, and youth input. This information (e.g., education, vocational skills and interests, job readiness level) should be updated regularly, especially for longer term youth. Facilities may consider creating a re-enrollment team to include parents/family members; community, vocational, and rehabilitation partners; and parole officers, to name a few.¹⁹
- Transition activities such as updating/obtaining a driver's license, employment applications, commitment to housing, and introductions to community providers should occur well in advance of release. Such activities will better ensure that solid relationships with mentors and key stakeholders are established before a youth leaves a facility. In addition, it is advised that youth be taught the process for obtaining vital records, how to budget and conduct banking transactions, how to use public transportation, the process for obtaining housing, how to connect to health and mental health services (and the limits of health insurance), and using mobile apps. Educating youth on the various processes will better ensure their success into adulthood.
- Youth should be connected to services in the community prior to release. Community partners (e.g., probation/parole, community service providers, youth advocates) can assist in the following:
 - Community service agencies
 - » Medical appointments
 - » Mental health counseling
 - » Substance abuse counseling
 - » Support groups
 - » Recreational and prosocial opportunities
 - » Ensuring continuity of medical coverage by ensuring Medicaid applications are successfully submitted and approved prior to release. It is important to note that in some states (i.e., Ohio), agencies can suspend Medicaid coverage while a youth is in a juvenile justice facility. In these cases, juvenile justice professionals must lift the suspension to activate the coverage once the youth is released back into the community.
 - Education
 - » Education records/credit transfer (preferably prior to release)
 - » Registration for community school, colleges, or vocational certification programs
 - » Tutoring services
 - Employment

- » Securing job interviews and/or employment start dates
- » Employment services
- Registering youth to vote and registering youth in the selective service system
- Jurisdictions should ensure that youth leave the facility with a portfolio of certificates, credits earned, and formal documentation of skills (in hard copy and electronically). This documentation will provide prospective employers a complete picture of the training the youth has received.¹⁹
- Family involvement in transition planning is an important component to youth success. Families should be involved in this planning throughout a youth’s stay, which may include invitations to multidisciplinary treatment team meetings, family counseling, the provision of needed resources to families (e.g., transportation assistance for visits, tablets for participating in remote sessions with their child, phone/internet expenses), giving family members and youth an active voice in determining treatment and aftercare needs/goals, and so on. It is important to note that for older youth, “family” may be defined beyond the traditional nuclear family to include grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, close family friends, partners/significant others, and mentors, to name a few. Additional resources for families are on the [Family Involvement resource page](#).
- Youth who are ultimately facing a transfer to the adult system often are scared and unsure of the challenges in their future. Organizing a peer support group can be an effective way to keep youth engaged. These groups would provide education to youth on what to expect in an adult facility; answer youth questions; help youth problem-solve; and, ultimately, relieve youth fears and concerns.

“As a resource for the youth, the transition team may develop a transition portfolio that may contain the following elements: (1) the IEP, (2) special education rights, (3) completed psychoeducational evaluations, (4) academic assessments, (5) school transcripts, (6) any certificates or diplomas earned by the youth, (7) vocational assessment results, (8) the youth’s résumé, (9) a transition resource packet, (10) course credit analysis, (11) the ITP, and (12) work samples. In addition, a representative from the facility, a counselor (or an individual who oversees re-enrollment) from the destination school, the family, community partners, and the youth’s parole officer can form a re-enrollment team that coordinates the transition back into regular school.”¹⁷

“Juvenile corrections staff can involve families by:

- Making available programs for family members, for example training in positive parenting techniques, behavioral management skills, understanding typical youth behavior, and effective communication
- Offering family counseling
- Communicating and treating families with respect—including being sensitive to their cultural and linguistic needs (e.g., providing information in a language that families can understand)—and making certain that they have the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns
- Including families as active members in the development of the transition plan, as well as accommodating multiple means of communication (e.g., in-person, phone, video conferencing)”¹³

Considerations for Department of Corrections Youth

One challenge that juvenile justice professionals often face is providing appropriate programming for youth who will be transferred to the adult system (i.e., Department of Corrections [DOC]). Although each state has different regulations governing how long youth may remain in the custody of the juvenile justice system (e.g., Utah is 21 years old, Oregon is 25 years old), many of the 16 jurisdictions interviewed reported challenges working with these youth. In some cases, these long-term youth may reside in a juvenile justice facility for up to 12 years before being transferred to the DOC to complete their sentence. It is important that professionals consistently engage these youth in meaningful ways to avoid youth acting out in an effort to “graduate” to a DOC facility sooner than the maximum age of transfer. Facilities should consider the recommendations offered throughout this white paper (e.g., provide youth with leadership opportunities, provide meaningful age-appropriate incentives for positive behaviors, create a supervised living unit in which older youth have increased responsibilities) to minimize the risk of youth prematurely advancing to the adult system.

Key Activities Prior to System Exit

- The transition team helps the youth complete job applications and arrange job interviews.
- The transition team helps the youth find job and training opportunities that match the youth’s interests and skills (e.g., auto mechanic training, cosmetology school).
- The transition team helps the youth connect with peer supports, a job coach, or mentors who can help the youth remain employed.
- The transition team arranges prerelease visits to job sites, apprenticeships, or job-shadowing opportunities.
- The transition team arranges site visits to new living situations (e.g., independent living, apartments, group homes).
- The transition team ensures that all identified appointments and contacts are arranged well in advance of release from the facility.¹⁹

As part of transition planning and months before a young person is transferred to the adult system, agencies should consider creating an educational support group to share information about what to expect in terms of life in an adult facility and answer questions that young adults may have. It may be beneficial to have a credible messenger (i.e., a formerly incarcerated individual) deliver this information. It also may be useful to have a point of contact at the DOC who can come to the juvenile justice facility to explain life in an adult facility. This DOC staff member also can assist youth with their transition when they arrive to the adult facility (i.e., ensuring youth continue their education and vocational training once placed in the adult facility) and throughout their first year at the DOC.

Funding Considerations

In the past several decades, numerous federal and state grants have been made available for juvenile justice programming (i.e., reentry, education, and vocational training). Much of the funding has been driven by federal

legislation aimed at providing equal access to education for youth at risk. Some of the federal legislation (and subsequent funding opportunities) include the [Second Chance Act](#), the [Elementary Secondary Education Act \(ESSA\)—Title I, Part D](#); [Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016](#), [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) and [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA Act\)](#). Although most jurisdictions are aware of these laws, some agencies may not be aware of the available resources and how funding can be creatively used while still complying with the grant requirements. Although an in-depth discussion about education and vocational funding for older youth is beyond the scope of this white paper, the information provided hopefully will spark agencies to ask additional questions and explore potential funding sources for working with older youth. States that have shown high levels of success in accessing funding report that their success is a result of persistence, attending meetings with partners (e.g., departments of education, employment, child welfare), and advocating for youth.

It is important to note that grant funding for youth residing in a juvenile justice setting can be quite complex, often with several layers and detailed requirements. For clarity of understanding, it is important to briefly describe two types of funding: block grants and competitive grants. Block grants are monies provided as “pass-through dollars” from a federal entity to individual states. Recipients of these funds (states) are required to develop a plan to explain how these monies will be spent in alignment with the grant goals and expectations. [TIPD](#) and the WIOA Act are two examples of block grants.

The Title I, Part D (TIPD) program (also called The Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or At Risk) was most recently reauthorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended in 2015.²⁰

TIPD is the largest federal program designed to support the education of youth who are in the juvenile justice and adult systems. Among the goals of TIPD are to

- provide services to successfully transition from institutionalization to further schooling or employment and
- prevent youth who are at risk for dropping out of school and provide dropouts and youth returning from correctional facilities with a support system to ensure their continued education.²⁰

Potentially eligible facilities include

- state-run juvenile detention centers,
- state-run youth development centers,
- state prisons serving juveniles,
- state-run residential programs for abandoned or neglected youth,
- locally operated juvenile detention centers,
- privately operated residential treatment centers for delinquent or neglected youth, and
- privately operated group homes for delinquent or neglected youth.²⁰

TIPD has two subparts. Subpart 1 holds state agencies responsible for providing free education to children and youth “in institutions for neglected or delinquent children and youth; attending community day programs for neglected or delinquent children and youth; or in adult correctional institutions.”²⁰ Subpart 2 applies to local education agencies (LEAs) with high numbers or percentages of children and youth in locally operated juvenile correctional facilities, including facilities involved in community day programs.²⁰ Examples of how Subpart 1 funding can be used include the following:²⁰

- Hire additional teachers, aides, educational counselors, and other staff members to provide additional instruction in the areas of greatest need. By maintaining a smaller staff-to-student ratio (i.e., 1:8), teachers can offer individualized instruction and attention to meet students’ academic and social needs.
- Train teachers, aides, and other staff members who are actively involved in providing TIPD services.
- Provide in-service trainings to help teachers of TIPD programs improve their relationships with the regular teachers and students in juvenile institutions.
- Procure needed educational materials and equipment for TIPD instruction, including books, computers, audiovisual equipment and supplies, and classroom materials for industrial arts and vocational training.
- Hire transition coordinators or buy new equipment to assist students who are transitioning out of facilities.
- Develop an academic and social skills curriculum.

TIPD funds also require a portion of the funds to assist youth in successfully transitioning back into the community. “Section 1418 of ESEA requires that each SA [State Agency] reserve not less than 15 percent or more than 30 percent of the amount received in any year under Subpart 1 to support ‘transition services.’”²⁰ Transition services must be “focused on helping children and youth reenter school successfully or to find employment after they leave the institution.”²⁰ Examples of transition-related services designed to meet the needs of neglected or delinquent (N or D) youth include the following:

- Counseling, psychological, and social work services
- In-school advocates to act on behalf of N or D children
- Tutoring and mentoring
- Reentry programs, including transition centers and reentry centers in high schools
- Instruction and training at alternative schools and learning centers
- Activities to increase parental involvement
- Parent counseling²⁰

Transition Services Example

“A State’s Transition Program for Juvenile Offenders provides a modified teaching schedule that facilitates transitional support, a structured student/teacher interview process, and systemic and continual monitoring of

student progress. The modified teaching schedule allows all housing units and special education teachers to devote one day a week to transition activities.

The housing unit teachers use their “transition day” to interview and advise students in the institutions and the community, while each special education teacher acts as an education liaison between the housing unit teacher and the parole officer. Permanent substitute teachers are assigned to the teachers’ classrooms on those days.”²⁰

TIPD, Subpart 2, LEAs may use in locally operated facilities as follows:

- “Carry out high-quality education programs that prepare children and youth to complete high school, enter training or employment programs, or further their education.
- Provide activities that facilitate the transition of such children and youth from the correctional program in an institution to further education or employment.
- Operate dropout prevention programs in local schools for children and youth who are at-risk of dropping out or youth returning from correctional facilities.”²⁰

Examples of TIPD, Subpart 2, funds are as follows:²⁰

- Programs that help youth transition from a correctional facility setting to a local school environment (to help them remain in school and complete their education).
- Dropout prevention programs targeting children and youth at risk.
- The coordination of health and social services, if the provision of such services will increase the likelihood that youth will complete their education. Such services may include day care, drug and alcohol counseling, and mental health services.
- Special programs to meet the unique academic needs of youth, including “career and technical education, special education, career counseling, curriculum-based youth entrepreneurship education, and assistance in securing student loans or grants for postsecondary education.”
- Mentoring and peer mediation.
- Programs for Native American children and youth at risk.
- “Pay for success initiatives (see Sec. 8101(40) for definition).”

For more information on TIPD funding, readers are encouraged to consult the Resources section of this white paper.

Juvenile justice managers and administrators should be aware of competitive grant opportunities. Competitive grants are available from public and private funders, but funding is not guaranteed. Examples of competitive grants are those associated with the Second Chance Act. Because each grant opportunity is unique, it is critical that agency and facility administrators understand the detailed grant requirements, devote the resources necessary to maintain compliance with these requirements, and develop innovative approaches to using funds while staying

aligned with the grant rules and expectations. Some tips follow for agencies and facilities to consider related to funding programs for older youth in a juvenile justice facility. Additional solutions are discussed in the “Identified System Gaps, Challenges, and Considerations” section of this white paper.

- Designate an individual(s) who is responsible for staying informed on federal and state legislation and grant funding opportunities. The funding landscape is ever changing, and new opportunities are constantly surfacing. Agencies that operate from old assumptions and outdated information will miss out on potential funding opportunities. For example, the majority of young adults residing in the community and who qualify as “low income” can apply for a federal Perkins loan to assist in paying for college classes. Years ago, juvenile justice youth were prohibited from receiving these funds. However, in recent years, the regulations now allow youth in juvenile justice facilities to access these monies. The resolution was born out of a new interpretation that youth in juvenile justice facilities are not “incarcerated” but are “adjudicated” and, therefore, should not be prohibited from accessing these loans. It is important to note that there is a 1% set aside associated with the Perkins loan, meaning it must be used for youth in a juvenile justice setting (i.e., technical training). Not staying current on legislative and grant funding changes will result in missed opportunities.

Funding Communications Infrastructure

The E-Rate program is a grant program funded through the [Universal Services Administration Company](#). The main goal of the E-rate program is to ensure “that schools and libraries across the U.S. are connected to information and resources through the internet.”²¹ Juvenile justice agencies throughout the United States have successfully accessed these funds and paid to establish 5G wireless infrastructure throughout their facilities and to cover the costs of work cell phones for facility administrators. In many cases, the E-Rate program will reimburse costs up to 90%. Juvenile justice professionals are encouraged to explore the E-Rate program and other similar opportunities.

- **Be creative and innovative; explore the various ways for using funds.** For example, some portion of Perkins loan funds can be “blended” or “braided” with other monies. Stipulations in Perkins loans allow for funding of facility-wide projects aimed at serving all facility youth, which includes programming for older youth. Facilities must think “outside the box” and stretch beyond perceived limitations to find creative interpretations of how grant monies can be spent.
- **Be selective and determine which grants the agency/facility will pursue.** Securing grant funding often is a complex process that extends beyond the application process and includes routine progress reporting, data reporting requirements, and regularly demonstrating how dollars were spent. It is therefore critical that juvenile justice administrators be strategic about the funding opportunities they wish to pursue and accurately calculate the resources necessary (e.g., people, time, money) to sustain grant funding across time. Agencies are encouraged to explore additional funding opportunities through federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Education; the U.S. Department of Justice; and the Division of Health and Human Services, children and families’ section.
- Identify agency and facility staff to stay informed of federal education loan requirements and clearly communicate expectations to youth. As previously mentioned, youth residing in juvenile justice facilities can

access certain types of student loans for their college education. However, youth must be made aware of many specific stipulations when accepting loan and/or grant monies. For example, once a young person receives their initial Pell grant installment, they have approximately 6 years (12 terms) to complete their degree.²² If the young person decides to take a break from school while in the facility or after release, the time clock does not stop. If the 6-year time frame elapses and the youth has not completed their college degree, they may not be eligible for future grant funding (at least through the Pell Grant system). Therefore, administrators and staff must develop a deep understanding of individual student loan and grant requirements and limitations.²³

- **Devote the time necessary to build and strengthen relationships with education and funding partners.** Agencies are encouraged to work closely with partners from the department of higher education to stay informed of new funding opportunities and remain up to date on up-and-coming vocational trends. In addition, it may be useful to foster relationships with local colleges and universities to better understand how and if a youth’s work experience within the facility can serve as “internship” hours and/or translate to college credits. Agencies also may benefit from accessing free services from the [National Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Neglected or Delinquent Children and Youth](#) (NDTAC), which remains up-to-date on current funding opportunities and can assist agency/facility staff in better understanding the detailed requirements associated with federal grant funding (i.e., TIPD).
- **Identify youth vocational needs early on and create a career pathway starting at intake.** As previously mentioned, transition begins at intake and should include educational and vocational assessments. Because vocational programming resources often are limited (e.g., a state system may have 10 facilities but only two in which welding certification programs are offered), it is essential that juvenile justice professionals identify youth vocational interests and skills as early as possible. With this information, staff can create a career pathway for the youth to ensure successful completion of the desired vocational certification program while in custody. This process may involve a youth being transferred to the proper adult or step-down facility that offers the identified programming.

Identified System Gaps, Challenges, and Needs for Providing Effective Services to Older Youth

Interviews with juvenile justice agency directors ($N = 16$) revealed several barriers that impede a system’s ability to effectively provide services to older youth in the juvenile justice system. Some of these challenges and considerations are discussed in this section.

Challenge 1: Lack of Federal and State Resources Devoted to the Continuum of Care

Considerations: States must have well-established processes to ensure that federal education dollars “follow the students” throughout their stay in long-term care facilities. Agencies must find alternative funding sources, such as TIPD and IDEA, and/or advocate for legislation changes to allow state-funded education or vocation dollars to continue throughout a youth’s stay in the juvenile justice system. Agencies also must consider exploring opportunities that allow for blending or braiding of funds for educational services in secure care settings. Other considerations include ensuring that all individualized education programs (IEPs) are up-to-date prior to transferring a youth to the adult system (i.e., DOC). In many cases, a current IEP allows access to funding for services through age 21 (and sometimes beyond). If an IEP is expired, the adult system will likely not make additional efforts to access the needed services because the youth is older than age 18 and considered an adult.

Many agencies interviewed reported a need for additional transition/step-down beds, including supervised group homes and independent living programs. Ideally, these programs would be established in towns and cities with job opportunities that align with the young person’s skills and work experience. These step-down programs would offer numerous benefits, including providing youth safe housing accommodations upon release, allowing youth an opportunity to exercise their new skills (e.g., budgeting, cooking, working, job responsibilities), and allowing the agency to monitor and coach youth as needed to better ensure youth success in the community. As part of the step-down process, juvenile justice facilities may find it beneficial to create a living unit geared toward teaching and reinforcing independent living skills. Youth may reside on this unit the last 6 months of their stay and would include youth taking on additional responsibilities, such as doing laundry, meal preparation, and budgeting for additional food.

Young offenders who are required to complete the remainder of their sentence with the DOC often are not able to complete their vocational certificate training because the DOC may not offer the same vocational programs or have different enrollment criteria. In many cases, the vocational program may be offered at only one location and at a facility that serves only the lowest risk offenders. It is critical that juvenile justice agencies and adult correctional entities work closely to align their systems to better ensure that young adults are able to complete their vocational certifications after being transferred to an adult facility.

Jurisdictions must provide the resources necessary (i.e., transition specialists positions for each facility) to ensure continuity of service provision after a youth’s release. Transition services may involve assisting youth with obtaining health insurance prior to release (i.e., Medicaid often is terminated once a youth is admitted to a juvenile justice facility, and a youth must reapply for benefits upon release), scheduling doctors and community mental health appointments, arranging for transportation to/from appointments or work, registering to vote, and assisting youth in completing college financial aid applications.

Challenge 2: A Rapidly Changing Job Market (States cannot implement vocational programs quickly enough to stay up-to-date with cutting-edge job industries.)

Considerations: Jurisdictions interviewed ($N = 16$) reported that state systems cannot keep pace with the changing job market. For example, if computer coding is a promising industry and an agency decides to implement a coding program, by the time the state can develop, adopt, fund, and fully implement a program in its facilities, the need no longer exists. As such, states must study industry trends on a continual basis to stay informed of up-and-coming industries. In addition, state agencies must closely examine processes related to “standing up” vocational certification programs (e.g., the approval process, costly resources needed, safety equipment). Using process improvement tools to streamline processes will enable agencies to implement vocational programs in a timely manner. Doing so will provide young adults with additional opportunities that are competitive in the ever-changing job market.

Challenge 3: Difficulty Accessing Loans and Grants to Assist Youth in Paying for College Classes While in a Juvenile Justice Facility

Although youth residing in a juvenile justice facility are not eligible for some federal student loans, financial aid opportunities do exist for young adults residing in such facilities (i.e., federal Pell Grants). According to the [Federal Student Aid for Students in Adult Correctional and Juvenile Justice Facilities](#),²³

- If the individual is confined in a federal or state penal institution, they are not eligible to receive Pell Grants. “However, if you’re incarcerated in a local, municipal, or county correctional facility or committed to a juvenile justice facility, and you otherwise meet the Federal Pell Grant eligibility requirements, you can receive Federal Pell Grants.”²³ It is important to note that individuals “convicted of a forcible or nonforcible sexual offense and . . . subject to an involuntary civil commitment upon completion of a period of incarceration for that offense”²³ are not eligible to receive Federal Pell Grants.
- Juvenile justice youth are eligible for federal student aid if they are on probation or parole. Juvenile justice professionals are encouraged to assist youth with the application process prior to release to avoid delay in receiving funds.
- Formerly incarcerated individuals may be eligible for aid from their state or school. Jurisdictions are encouraged to explore state grant and loan opportunities available.
- [Federal Work-Study \(FWS\)](#) and [Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants \(FSEOG\)](#) do not prohibit students confined in juvenile justice facilities from receiving FWS and FSEOG funding, but it is uncommon for confined individuals to receive these types of aid.

Through its Higher Education for Incarcerated Youth program and \$300,000.00 from the state budget, Utah provides free college courses to youth in its juvenile justice system, including youth residing in secure facilities. The state uses a secure network, [the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange](#), to provide youth access to college courses while ensuring security.²⁴

Generally, students are not able to perform an FWS job while confined in a secure facility, and the amount of FSEOG funds available to schools is limited.

Considerations: Advocacy is needed at the state and federal levels to allow youth held in juvenile justice facilities broader access to education loans and grants.

Challenge 4: Competing Philosophies Impeding Youth’s Ability to Successfully Complete Most Vocational Certification Programs

Considerations: Best practice research shows that shorter lengths of stays have the greatest impact on reducing recidivism.²⁵ Many agencies have worked to reform their systems to better align with best practices, including shortening the length of stay in secure facilities. Unfortunately, the length of time needed to complete some vocational certification programs often is more than a year. States must develop strategies to ensure that youth have opportunities to complete certification programs, whenever possible. Such strategies may include allowing youth to enroll in a more intensive course load (i.e., take multiple classes at the same time) if a youth’s academic skills can support success. It also is important that youth remain connected to their programs and can finish their vocational training in-person or virtually throughout the transition process. Additional staff resources to monitor youth in the community (following release from the facility) also would help increase the likelihood youth will complete their college and/or vocational programming.

Challenge 5: State Regulations Preventing Facility Staff From Maintaining Healthy Positive Relationships After Youth Return to Their Communities

Considerations: State regulations sometimes prohibit facility staff from staying in contact with youth after their release from a juvenile justice facility. Although precautions need to be taken and clear boundaries/expectations must be set in policies and through staff training, states may benefit from examining policies that drive this current practice. For youth who have been in a juvenile justice facility more than a year and/or for those youth who are older and are being released back into the community, maintaining healthy positive relationships with staff members may be a powerful factor influencing youth success. Abruptly terminating these relationships upon release may not serve youth because it interrupts a youth’s current positive support network.

Many agencies identified a lack of resources devoted to building relationships with community partners (e.g., volunteers, business owners who can help youth secure employment, universities). Services offered by community service agencies often remain untapped resources and can provide a wealth of services, including prerelease assistance. Facilities may consider hosting an “open house” and allowing community members to tour the facility, ask questions, and interact with the youth. Young adults can be afforded the opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills by interacting with guests and explaining programming and services offered. Additional resources are needed in this area, particularly for older youth who are transitioning back into the community.

Challenge 6: Facility Direct Care Staff Not Equipped to Work With Older Youth

Considerations: Because direct care staff positions often are entry-level positions, staff are commonly in their early 20s. As mentioned previously, some jurisdictions allow youth to remain in the custody of the juvenile justice system into their early to mid-20s, and, therefore, staff members may be the same age as the youth they are supervising. It is important that agencies formally train staff on how to best interact with youth who are similar in age, including how to maintain appropriate boundaries.

Conclusion

This white paper focused on programming for youth ages 17 and older residing in secure custody settings. The goal is for jurisdictions to apply some of the strategies and practices highlighted. This white paper also provides a set of the common challenges that juvenile justice systems and facilities face and puts forth a unique set of possible solutions for consideration. It is important for readers to understand that developing and implementing effective programming for older youth cannot be achieved alone, whether at the facility or agency level. Success hinges on jurisdictions collaborating with system partners, stakeholders, and legislators; accessing additional funding and resources; working closely with families to support transition; and gathering input from older youth regarding their interests, needs, and goals. Ultimately, a team approach to enhancing existing programming will increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for youth, including preventing future incarceration.

Resources

- [OJJDP's Model Programs Guide | Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention \(ojp.gov\)](#)
- [Check & Connect Online Mentoring Guide](#)
- [Credible Messenger Center](#)
- [Transition and Re-Entry Practices](#) (OSEP Ideas That Work)
- [Access to a High-Quality Education](#) (OSEP Ideas That Work)
- [Youth with Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections: Transition and Reentry to School and Community](#) (IRIS Center)
- [Developing Problem-Solving Strategies for Successful Reentry](#) (Correctional Education Association)
- [Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings](#)
- [Correctional Educational Association](#)
- [RACHEL](#) (Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning)
- [Family Involvement Resource Page](#) (OSEP Ideas That Work)
- [Second Chance Act](#)
- [The Elementary Secondary Education Act \(ESSA\), the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016](#)
- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#)

- [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA Act\)](#)
- [TIPD](#)
- [Federal Student Aid for Students in Adult Correctional and Juvenile Justice Facilities](#)
- [Federal Work-Study Program \(FWS\)](#)
- [Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants \(FSEOG\)](#)
- [NDTAC website](#)
- U.S. Department of Education: [Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk-Title I, Part D](#)
- Non-Regulatory Guidance: [Title I, Part D Nonregulatory Guidance Introduction](#) (NDTAC)
- [TIPD Statute](#) (NDTAC)
- [Treehouse Educational Advocacy Program](#) (Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families)
- [Policy Considerations: Re-entry/Transition Planning](#) (Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators)

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