

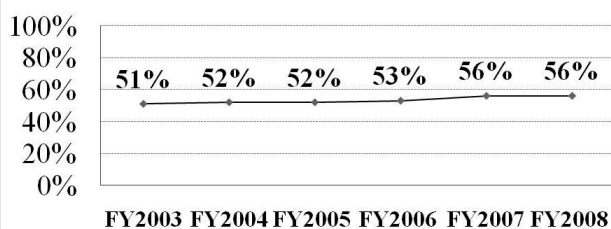
Volume 7, Issue 27, April 2010

**Roadmap to Better Aftercare, Reduced Recidivism***Nationally Recognized Standard Provides Guide to Improve Juvenile Reentry, Public Safety***Executive Summary**

Maryland must provide effective reentry services for youth returning to communities from residential programs. Adoption and implementation of a performance-based reintegration standard will improve transitions during reentry and reduce re-arrests. The current rate of re-arrests within one year of release is over 50%.

**Introduction**

In Maryland, more than one out of two youth released from committed, residential facilities is re-arrested within one year. The continuum of services provided to youth returning from out-of-home placements is as critical to the youth's success in avoiding re-arrest as the treatment provided while in placement. Comprehensive aftercare plans are needed to create continuity in care between placements and home. These plans should address the youth's mental health, educational, vocational, physical health, substance abuse, and other social needs. This brief will analyze a performance-based reintegration standard and show how Maryland can implement successful aftercare strategies.

**Recidivism Within One Year of Release****Performance-Based Reintegration Standard**

Ten years ago, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) commissioned the Performance-Based Standards (PbS) and the Intensive Aftercare Programs (IAP) projects to develop a standard that addresses juvenile reintegration.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Juvenile Reintegration and Aftercare Center, *Intensive Juvenile Aftercare Guide* ( Mar. 2004)

resulting standard lays out expected practices, clear outcome measures, and processes that are critical to successfully transition youth from residential facilities back into their communities. The standard is based on the following guidelines:

- treat youth in the context of their community and family by including families in treatment
- develop collaboration between facility staff and community case managers
- ensure youth are referred to and accepted by community programs prior to release
- provide youth with programs that increase responsibility and freedom in the community
- create transition plans that are tailored toward individual needs.

By using this standard to evaluate current practices and implement needed changes, Maryland can ensure juveniles exiting placement receive the support and services necessary to transition into productive adolescents and young adults and reduce future delinquency and criminal activity.

*Treat Youth in the Context of their Family by Including Families in Treatment*

Including families in programming and treatment of youth is an essential component of quality aftercare. Effective face-to-face interaction and communication with case managers and participation in treatment services are fundamental aspects of the families' role in transitioning youth back into the community. Observation and assessment of the entire family can help case managers identify strengths and weaknesses within the family structure. The results help to identify relationships that reinforce both positive and negative behavior, to develop realistic approaches towards addressing the needs of the youth, and to make additional referrals as needed.

*Develop Collaboration between Facility Staff and Community Case Managers*

Developing and maintaining collaborative relationships between facility staff and community case managers is essential for youth to successfully transition back into their communities. Both parties



share responsibilities in the treatment process. A collaborative relationship allows facility staff to share information that is meaningful to release planning and allows community case managers to maintain awareness of rehabilitative treatment during placement so that they can identify proper services, help engage youth in her/his aftercare program and recognize challenges and obstacles in the aftercare process.

*Ensure Youth are Referred to and Accepted by Community Programs Prior to Release*

Successful community reentry for youth requires seamless transition between services provided in the facility and the community. Case managers must ensure that youth have access to employment, education services, vocational training, health care, recreational activities, and other opportunities. Linking youth to community services in a timely manner is an essential part of aftercare, especially during the step-down process, when case managers gradually turn supports over to family, school, and community organizations. In-person contact between youth and providers prior to release helps establish a relationship between youth and support systems that eases the transition from facility to community.

*Provide Youth with Programs that Increase Responsibility and Freedom in the Community*

Youth can be prepared for increased responsibilities and freedom by connecting treatment progress with authorized leaves and passes such as home visits, furloughs, field trips, and other activities outside the facility. Clear goals and expectations keep incarcerated youth actively engaged in their treatment and release plans.

*Create Transition Plans that are Tailored Toward Individual Needs*

It is necessary for facility staff and community case managers to actively participate in cultural competency and diversity training, to provide written materials, including aftercare plans in appropriate languages, and to establish relationships with community agencies whose staff are culturally and language-appropriate. Specific, individualized planning has great importance because it allows for engagement in treatment and aftercare services that reflect the values of the youth's culture and increases the likelihood of successful reintegration.

**Example**

**Standard:** Facilitate in-person contact between parent(s), guardian(s), and aftercare case manager while youth is at facility, regardless of meeting location

**Outcome Measure:** Percent of youth with initial, regular and pre-release contacts between parents, guardians and aftercare case managers.

**Expected Practices:**

Aftercare manager meets with youth's parents or guardians within 30 days of arrival.

Within 30 days of youth's arrival, family receives orientation, review of aftercare placement options, list of available community services and a forum to express concerns and ideas.

**Process:** Facility articulates a philosophy / mission regarding the importance of the aftercare case manager having in-person contact with parents, guardians, and youth. It is included in training curriculum, facility policies, staff reviews, and job descriptions.

**Process:** Space is provided at the facility for aftercare case manager to meet with youth and parents or guardians. Visits occur outside facility if necessary.

**Conclusion**

The performance-based reintegration standard provides a roadmap to improved aftercare services for youth leaving placements. Adoption of the standard and use of its outcome measures, expected practices and processes to evaluate and amend current practices are an important component of the overall strategy to reduce high rates of recidivism among juveniles. Improved juvenile reentry and lower recidivism rates is not only good for public safety, but has financial implications for the State.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Advocates for Children and Youth, *Aftercare for Juveniles Improve Public Safety and Pays for Itself* (Apr. 2010)