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Background

Connecticut has always been a pioneer change agent and a national leader in juvenile justice system reforms. Over the last decade, the state has instituted a series of new legislation and policies, established an oversight committee and supported community organizations to establish an exemplary juvenile justice system that has proven to be effective, fair, and just.

Recognizing that designing an effectual juvenile justice system requires collaboration among various community stakeholders --families, school systems, law enforcement agencies, health service providers, and social work organizations, among others -- in 2006, the Local Inter Agency Service Teams (LIST) were developed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (CSSD) when they launched a joint strategic plan aptly named, Building Toward a Better Future. The strategic plan aimed at engaging multiple stakeholders to achieve the dual goal of preventing children and youth from involvement in the juvenile justice system and offering reconstructive intervention strategies for those involved with the system. The plan, updated in 2013-16 by CSSD and DCF, provided a blueprint for a process, mechanism, and structure for facilitating such collaboration and coordination across various community stakeholder and service agencies.

The LISTs are currently under the supervision of CSSD and the lead agency supporting them is the Connecticut Youth Services Association.

Rationale for Establishing LISTs

There is significant evidence that sending delinquent and at-risk children and youth to jail is not an effective way to keep them out of trouble and keep communities safe. Connecticut's own experience with juvenile justice reform over the past decade suggests that the system's strategies aimed at directing children and youth offenders to interventions and support programs that offer mental health help, provide support against substance abuse, and furnish constructive mentorship and educational opportunities work effectively in reducing crime and improving community safety. There is significant evidence that advocates of this approach say alternatives to jail reduce recidivism.

In an Op-ed piece, one of the leading experts in the field, Diane Sierpina, Director of Justice Initiatives at the Tow Foundation, opines, "Policymakers, advocates and funders have begun to realize that justice policy reform alone will not improve outcomes for youth with high needs and high risk of breaking the law. More attention needs to be paid to the root causes of delinquent behavior... exposure to violence in the community or home, poor nutrition, failing schools, homelessness, mental

health and substance abuse, tying them to future delinquency."

Objectives, and Scope of the LIST

Each LIST serves as a forum for facilitating community-wide collaboration and coordination across various agencies involved in delivery of juvenile justice system services. As independent community-based organizations, LISTs are designed to be led by a Lead Entity (Connecticut Youth Services Association) who acts as its fiduciary, serves as its statewide administrator and is responsible for planning and management of LIST functions. Each LIST is structured to be headed by a LIST Manager who will act as a liaison and facilitatorfor that LIST. While acting as the storehouse of knowledge and providers of information resources, as well as coordinators and facilitators for service providers to serve the clients, the LISTs are not service providers themselves. However, their member organizations can offer services.

Each LIST works on a separate project or focus area explained in their yearly workplan which, along with monthly meetings,



are now captured in agenda and minutes; however, occasionally they work together on a project across court districts. Among work on truancy, diversion, restorative practices, LISTs are urrently working on gathering information on the impacts of the new Marijuana laws/policy practice and how it impacts youth and how it affects stakeholders in different communities statewide. Information gathered from these forums will help inform future policy and practice changes.

Specific Goals for each LIST are

- Encourage collaborative efforts among local stakeholders for assessing the physical, social, behavioral, and educational needs of children and youth in their respective communities that leads to juvenile justice involvement, and for assisting in the development of comprehensive plans to ad-dress such needs. The infrastructure for planning is intended to be data-driven and encourage the use of evidence-based approaches and programs to support positive youth development.
- Decrease the number of children and youth referred to court.
- Address the disproportionate minority contact
- Support families with information and access to services
- Support interagency prevention strategies
- Improve access to services
- Improve services and outcomes
- Increase the sharing of information and knowledge about services and the juvenile justice system
- Create partnerships between communities and state agencies in the development of community –based interventions
- Be organized to respond to federal, state, and private grant opportunities

The LIST Structure

There is one LIST for each Juvenile Court. Represented groups within the LISTs include:

- Family and Parents,
- Children and youth groups and their representatives
- Court Support Services Division and Department of Children and Families,
- Youth Service Bureaus
- School districts,
- Law enforcement including Police.



- Social service organizations
- Larger community (faith-based organizations, , business/labor associations, healthcare providers, local volunteers)

The Lead Entity is responsible for reporting on, a) state of finances, b) project progress, and c) future projects/work plans to JBCSSD at a predetermined frequency and individual LISTs report their activity to CYSA as the fiduciary on a regular basis.

LISTs are a fine example of a systemic development strategy as a partnership between various stakeholder groups and state agencies to further community safety, prosperity and well-being.

Hope for Positive Future Impact

There is a reason to be optimistic that multiple stakeholder involvement in planning and implementation of prevention and intervention strategies through the LIST initiative will lead to successfully alleviating and eliminating critical causes

of juvenile justice system involvement, namely, economic and shelter insecurity, trauma, mistrust of justice systems, lack of opportunities for low-income and racial minorities and more. By bringing together various perspectives, experiences, and expertise from various agencies and institutions, the LIST initiative is expected to yield some innovative and impactful solutions to solve juvenile justice issues and diversion from system involvement.



Looking into future directions, there is a near consensus supporting Diane Sierpina's view that, "It is time, in this new decade, to recommit to the ideals that kids are different from adults and should be treated as children when [held accountable] for their actions and behavior, even when those actions are violent. Even youth charged with violent crimes have the capacity to be rehabilitated and to become assets to their communities and society."

This Issue Brief was authored by University of New Haven Masters' student Jasmine Kaur.

Sources

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The Tow Youth Justice Institute is a university, state and private partnership established to lead the way in juvenile justice reform through collaborative planning, training, research and advocacy.

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