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Transforming Youth Justice: A Leadership Development Program (Cohort 6)

Topic: Effective Transition Practices for Juvenile Justice Involved Youth

Date: May 6th, 2022

Introduction:

Why is it necessary to ensure that all youth placed in the juvenile detention centers are transitioned efficiently back to their communities and schools upon release and whose job is it? In the detention center various staff and providers are responsible for ensuring that transition plans are completed and implemented such as the education and medical providers, juvenile justice staff, and court support staff. This means that collaboration is critical and necessary in all transition planning and should not be reserved for any specific group of staff. It is more imperative in the educational transition plan because the juvenile justice involved youth are often disconnected from schools and lack the necessary skills required to be academically and behaviorally successful. The history of juvenile justice involved youth indicates that most of this population have been academically unsuccessful, dropped out of school, have poor attendance, and possibly experience some form of learning disabilities. As a result, they often face challenges such as missing school especially when placed in different alternative educational settings. This population of youth also face the challenges of being stigmatized by their peers due to the identified social/emotional needs in certain circumstances. Effective transition plan will help reduce the effects and impact of discontinuation of educational services and may also help reduce recidivism through increased community and educational engagement when released from the placements or detention centers. Smooth transition back to the communities and homeschools will help alleviate some of the challenges the youth encounter or face upon release.

Description of the Problem:

The youth placed in juvenile justice settings often experience significant behavioral and academic challenges and it is difficult to track educational records and placements especially when placed in different programs throughout the school year. Lack of transitional programs and services also impact the ability of the youth to return to their schools without interruption of services especially for the special education students. Often times, the youth may not also have a support system in place to help them navigate the available community programs and services even when all the systems are put in place prior to release. Monitoring adults such as parents, care givers, educational advocates, surrogate parents, or mentors have different roles to ensure effective transition to their communities, homes, and schools. Specific to education, transitional services are paramount and vital to ensure that the youths are able to return to their home schools with all the necessary records. Failure to plan an effective transition process will increase the probability of the youth being involved in illegal activities which in turn affect their communities. If students are successfully transitioned back to their communities with the right programs and services in place, the chances of connectedness and all the necessary conditions required for better outcomes will be increased. The educational transition plan for all youth should include academic, social, emotional, vocational, and/or job support. Currently, in the state's juvenile detention centers, there are no specific outlined formal transition plan used as a model in ensuring positive outcomes for all the youths upon release. The staff survey indicated that although some aspects of recommended research-based practices are implemented by the

programs, the education providers in the detention centers have different and specific systems in place for educational transition plans. The need for uniform practice across both detention centers is necessary especially since most of the youth are usually identified as in need of special education services. In 2000, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reported the prevalence of disabilities among school age children in the United States as 9%, compared with the estimated of 32% within the juvenile justice system (Stenhjem, 2005). Also, in 2012, National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center reported that approximately 5.8 million children and youth, ages 6–21, received special education and related services in the general population, which is about 13 percent of all public-school students (Read, 2014).

Research:

Research has shown that effective transitional services for juvenile justice involved youth will lead to positive outcomes and potential success upon release. Efficient transitional services will provide continuation of educational and behavioral services and supports. The need to use evidence-based transitional practices are critical for promoting the students' success especially after release. Success is not only restricted to the detention centers where the students are held but should include all stakeholders such as the community members, partners, and the families. The Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention indicates that the average recidivism rate for juvenile offender is about 55% within 12 months of release (Mathur & Clark, 2014). This shows that engagement is necessary to further reduce the recidivism rate for the juvenile offenders. In education transition planning, engagement is an important indicator in measuring the youth's success and it includes their ability to return to their home schools, connection to work, and the ability to use and apply all the social emotional skills learned including Dialectic and Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Thoughts Emotions and Behavior (TEB) Skills, Positive Youth Development (PYD), and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Specific to Hartford Detention Center) to avoid future arrests. Mathur and Clark (2014), indicates that about 30% to 60% of juvenile justice involved youth have disabilities and require special education services. Addressing the critical and unique needs of the students with disabilities who are more disengaged than their peers and are less likely to be engaged after release without additional supports. These population are also significantly affected if services are not put in place to support their families which may be impacted as well due to the disability especially with emotional or behavioral disorders. Therefore, it is imperative to put a system of support in place through collaboration and communication to all pertinent stakeholders to ensure that the youth and their families are able to access resources needed for successful integration and transition. Other research-based approaches that can help reduce recidivism for the youth placed in the detention centers specific to developing a plan for each youth to include social/behavioral goals, plans for family support, psychological, academic, and vocational goals, and strategies for monitoring outcomes. It is also imperative to continue the goals as the youth progresses or fails to progress with intentional communication to all the stakeholders about the progress or lack of it (Stenhjem, 2005). The role of a Transition Specialist is also needed to ensure successful integration back to the home schools and communities and data should be tracked at least one year after release. In Hartford Juvenile Detention Center, data for the students are tracked at intervals from seven days to 90 days after release.

Several research studies have identified and developed sets of guiding principles for effective transition services. Mathur and Clark (2014) identified the use of individualized services to address the specific needs and deficits of the youth, housing and community support, family connections, access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, structured workforce preparation, employment, school attendance, and better use of the youth's leisure time (p. 717). The research also suggested specific components for students with special educational needs such as individualized transition plans, transition portfolios, transfer of records, interagency collaboration, and a tracking system. Furthermore, the National Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Neglected or Delinquent Children and Youth also identified guidelines for effective transition plans which includes six overarching practices. The suggested practices are setting up a transition team early with consistent communication, efficient record transfer, transition plan, researched-based programming, regular monitoring and tracking and adequate funding (Clark, Mathur, Brock, O'Cummings, & Milligan, 2016). The identified practices from the mentioned study will form the basis for this project and the recommended plans will be used to develop effective transition service for the youth in the detention centers. Research-based programs such as restorative justice practices have been identified also as a proactive alternative for schools and communities when addressing the involvement of youth in criminal activity especially for the ones identified as in need of special education services. Expelling or suspending the youth from school drives them into the juvenile court system, and juvenile corrections. Rather than being involved with juvenile justice system, restorative justice practices can be incorporated into school policies (Stenhjem, 2005) as a preventative measure. Restorative practices such as circles could be used to address delinquent behaviors through accountability and collaboration. Other services indicated through research which can be beneficial for the youth upon release is wrap-around services through the use of community-based, family-focused, and prevention-oriented collaboration. These measures will help reduce incarceration of the youth for longer periods of time. Youth with disabilities as well as others within the juvenile justice system often need a wide range of individualized support. So, these services need to be comprehensive, collaborative, and available within the diverse communities and environments where the youth live (Stenhjem, 2005).

Effective Transition Plan

Clark, Mathur, Brock, O'Cummings, & Milligan (2016) outlined four distinct stages of transition stages for juvenile justice involved youth: entry into the juvenile detention center, residence, exit from the facility, and aftercare. The study recognized that the transition process in each stage is complex but should be addressed intentionally for better outcomes for all the youth who may move to different placements before returning home or to their communities. It is important to note that transition services for each youth may be different and there are no specific models to follow since each facility and state handles transition services differently. Also, the transition path for each youth varies based on their individual cases, decisions and choices made for and by the youth from law enforcement agents and the courts. Other research study in transition planning affirms that when youth with or without disabilities are involved and invested in the transition planning process created for them, they are more likely to be positively engaged in school, work, and the community upon release. Administrators and educators in the detention centers also play a critical role in making sure that transition specialists are equipped with the

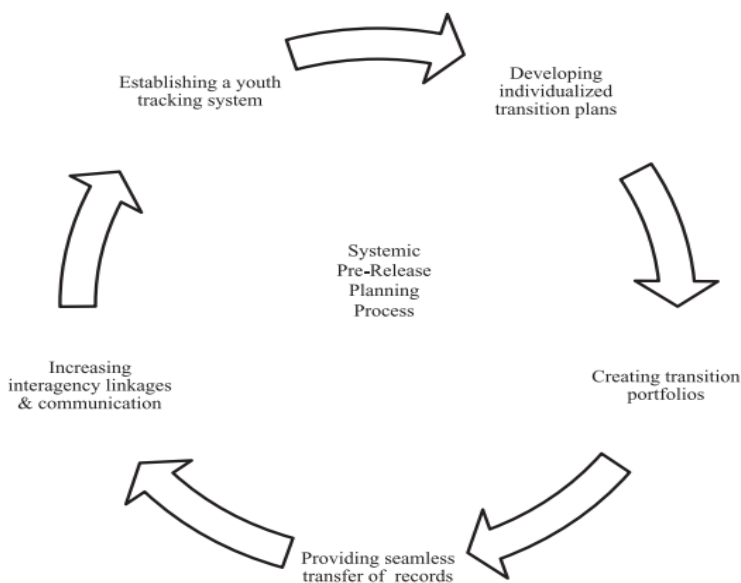
necessary resources to promote collaboration of all the parties involved in the decision-making process for each youth (Mathur & Clark, 2013). After reviewing different transition processes including the surveys completed by staff (Education and Detention Center) both Hartford and Bridgeport detention centers, Connecticut Reentry programs, CT Center for Children's Advocacy, New York state transition plan, the decision to use the effective practices to promote smooth transition for juvenile justice involved youth outlined in the Transition Toolkit 3.0 Meeting the Educational Needs of Youth Exposed to Juvenile Justice System (Clark, Mathur, Brock, O'Cummings, & Milligan, 2016) was determined as a model for this project. The practices seem to be clear and similar to the plan used in the education department at Hartford Juvenile Detention Center. Although it will look different depending on the people and staff involved but it can serve as a model for different programs and detention centers.

Practice 1: Transition Team

The first practice to effective transition is to build a team from the first day a youth enters the detention center and early formalized communication with all stakeholders is necessary to ensure that all the team members are collaborating for success. It is important to start planning for post release engagement the day the youth arrive at the detention facility and supports, and services should continue as they leave the facility to prevent barriers and challenges upon release (Mathur & Clark, 2013). Furthermore, Stenhjem (2005) indicates that collaboration should be intentional, changes the relationships withing the team members as they strive to achieve the transition goals for each youth. Stenhjem (2005) asserts that for collaboration to be effective, it should consist of three critical elements, **common goals and directions, shared responsibility, and working together** to achieve the goals (p. 3). The needs of each youth will vary, and it is paramount that all stakeholders including the juvenile justice staff, families, guardian, school districts, community partners or providers, educators, and medical providers have policies in place to support collaborative effort through effective and intentional, consistent, and regular communication. Interagency/intersystem collaboration with formal agreements, relationships, and cooperation of all involved in the team necessary to ensure that everyone is aware of the plan (Clark, Mathur, Brock, O'Cummings, & Milligan, 2016). Transition planning starts with effective communication to ensure collaboration of all involved in the transition process. A transition team should be put in place upon the youth's enrollment based on the needs of the identified needs. A collaborative approach will help provide all involved pertinent information at every planning stage as soon as the youth is enrolled in the program. A transition team approach should be used in setting transition goals and delineate responsibilities and roles of each member based on the needs of the youth. Transition Specialist should plan for all juvenile involved youth should start from the first day of enrollment. Transition specialist should contact all involved in the youth's education including home, guardian, school, programs, and agencies upon enrollment to provide pertinent information needed to provide transitional and educational needs. In some cases, various agencies, educational settings, juvenile detention centers, and community service providers should be contacted as well to address each youth and often times, the family's needs especially if language barrier is identified. Each youth and his or her family member or guardian will have a different set of needs and goals. Collaboration is important to ensure smooth transition upon release. Youth voice should be promoted in the planning phase as well as collaboration between the transition specialist and the family of the youth involved. The youth is

more likely to be successful if the youth and his or her parents/guardian/child advocate are involved in decision making and the transition. Consistent communication with all partners, agencies, schools, and families throughout enrollment to ensure that the transition goals and are met as well as establish a strong connection to schools, community-based programs, and employment opportunities if needed and finally help youth integrate back into their communities. Finally, once enrolled, prerelease or reentry plans should begin immediately guided by the academic and vocational assessments and needs including school, medical, behavioral, mental health care, vocational training, work, life skills, and public assistance in some cases depending on the age of the youth (Mathur & Clark, 2013). A sample of the components of a detention-based pre-release planning below can be used as a model or modified to meet the needs of the youth during the transition planning process (Mathur & Clark, 2013).

Figure 1. Components of detention-based prerelease planning.



Practice 2: Transition Plan

Transition plans should include the creation or revision of any existing plan upon entry/re-entry with active involvement of all the transition team members as well as the youth and not just a plan created for him/her. Also, family involvement is needed including the guardian, advocates, and any other adult involved in the youth's life at home. Family involvement is also necessary to support culturally and linguistically appropriate services. The plan should guide educational and placement programming to address individualized needs with identified goals such as career, vocational, support for student with disabilities and compliance with their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plans. Most importantly, the plan should be monitored for modification or change if needed (Clark, Mathur, rock, O'Cummings, & Milligan, 2016). The transition plan should be written as a formal document indicating each component of the plan including the team members responsibilities, transition goals, activities, documentation of all transition plans and supports. Efforts should be made to include the youth in each step of the plan

to promote youth voice as well as provide opportunities for involvement in creating the plans. The plan should be amenable and responsive to the needs of the youth including academic, behavioral, socio-emotional, and career with identified supports and services. Also, consideration should be given to the transition plan to ensure appropriate program and educational placements are identified for continuous services both academic and behavioral needs when considering school placements during a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings for special education students. Family involvement is necessary to ensure smooth transition especially if the youth will be returning home. Transition plans for special education students should align with their Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals and 504 plans. Monitoring transition plans should be required to consistently update and check the validity of the goals while enrolled in the program. Using research-based programming will help prepare the youth for success as they are released from the detention center. Programming should include academic (special and regular education), social and emotional, mental health support and treatment.

Practice 3: Research-Based Programming

Most of the youth placed in the detention centers need comprehensive research-based services and programming specific to their individual needs. Scientific research-based programming has been proven to have positive outcomes for youth including behavioral and cognitive based practices. These types of programming provide opportunities for academic support including regular and special education needs, mental health, socio-emotional, behavioral, and vocational supports. Families of youth placed in the detention center often times have needs that may impede the successful re-entry or transition back to their homes such as mental health and/or substance abuse treatment. The youth and families will benefit from using positive and social development, cognitive behavioral approach, and family-centered approaches associated with positive improvement and outcomes. These programs will be used to address each family's need (Clark, Mathur, Rock, O'Cummings, & Milligan, 2016). Some of these practices used at both detention centers include DBT and restorative justice practices. In addition, PBIS, TEB, and PYD skills are also used in Hartford detention center.

Practice 4: Regular Monitoring and Tracking

A key component to transition plan success is regular monitoring of the outcomes of the programs and services. This involves intensive data collection specific to programs, systems, communities, and multiple sources of data to be analyzed regularly to measure outcomes using program evaluation data, self-assessments, evaluations, and monitoring reports. Also, the use of multiple data collection method will help provide a wide array of information necessary for implementation and program monitoring. A more comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis will help focus on the effectiveness of each transition plan as well as measure success. Regularly monitoring and tracking transition programs and services will help ensure that the needs of the youth are met. The transition Specialist should be responsible in tracking, collecting, and analyzing data regularly using multiple sources including assessments, evaluations, and program evaluations to measure outcomes. Multiple methods of data collection such as questionnaires, observations, focus groups, and interviews, should be used to ensure comprehensive use of data in measuring outcomes across all the four stages of transition. Data collection examples should include high school credits, number of days enrolled, number of days IEP was received, record transfer information, number of youths applying to post-secondary

education, number of youths enrolled back to their home schools, number of youths returned to the program, number of high school graduates, etc. The youth should also be tracked from 7, 30, 60, and 90 days after release to ensure smooth transition and integration back to their home schools and/ or community programs.

Practice 5: Efficient Record Transfer

Effective and timely transfer of records allow for continuity of services including school records, assessments, services, and outlined supports. It is also important to comply with the specific federal, state, and local mandates that provides and support transfer of records through collaborative communication and the use of electronic data system. Efficient transfer of records will provide opportunity for the stakeholders to share necessary information related to aftercare services upon released (Clark, Mathur, rock, O’Cummings, & Milligan, 2016).

Educational records transfer is necessary for a successful reintegration of the youth back into their home schools to allow educational continuity and special education services if needed. The Transition Specialist should collaborate with the home districts or residential placements/programs to ensure that the youth’s educational records are transferred confidentially in a timely manner. The record transfer should start as soon as the release dates are determined. If unknown, the transfer of records should be completed within 24 hours of the youth’s release from the program. Transferring records electronically are more efficient however, all federal, state, and local laws about record transfers should be adhered to throughout the process.

Practice 6: Adequate Funding

Allocating adequate funding to ensure that necessary resources for transition services are available and provided to the youth in the detention centers can be challenging. Therefore, it is imperative for each facility to allocate funds and resources to address the needs of the population as well as establish plans on how to sustain a comprehensive transition plan, services, and supports. For example, every school district with over 6,000 students is required to designate a juvenile justice liaison officer. These individuals are notified when a student from their district enters any juvenile detention centers. Therefore, school districts will need more funding to hire enough staff to address the needs of their students. Transition specialists or coordinators are also needed in the detention centers to be able to focus on the plans, programs, and services available to the youth while in the facility and continuity upon release. For example, Title I, Part D (Part D) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires that each state agency that receive funding from the federal government should reserve 15–30 % of its allocation specifically for transition services (Section 1418(a) of the ESEA). Also, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) receive different grants to support programs that involve collaboration with the juvenile detention facilities including activities that facilitate the transition of youth from correctional programs/detention centers to education or employment activities upon release (Section 1421(2) of the ESEA). These and other federal funds are also available for schools and the detention centers to actively re-engage or re-integrate the youth placed in the facilities to their homes/schools upon release (Clark, Mathur, rock, O’Cummings, & Milligan, 2016). Funding is necessary to ensure that the youth are provided with the best transitional services to address their individual needs. Sustaining the position of the Transition Specialist is necessary

for continuation of services. It is important to note that state and local agencies have money available for transitional services each year for juvenile justice involved youth.

Concept/Plan of Action

I have reviewed the available transition programs and services offered to the youth in Connecticut at Hartford and Bridgeport Juvenile Detention Centers. The information from the questionnaires given to different staff members ranging from 5-18 years of experience working with juvenile justice involved youth including classified program officers, supervisors, shift managers, administrator, transition specialist, and school social worker. The selected staff members serve in different roles but are involved in providing transition services. I also identified different community programs, services, and resources available for the youth upon release in Hartford as a member of the Juvenile Review Board (JRB-Hartford) to share with the Transition Specialist. As a result of being a member of the JR, I was able to gather enough information about community programs available for the youth who are resident of Hartford. In the context of this proposal, I hope that comparable services may be available across different programs for juvenile justice involved youth in Connecticut. Finally, I created a model of effective transitional services for the juvenile involved youth with a feasible implementation plan which can be used by different programs to ensure continuity of services for juvenile justice involved youth (See Figure 2).

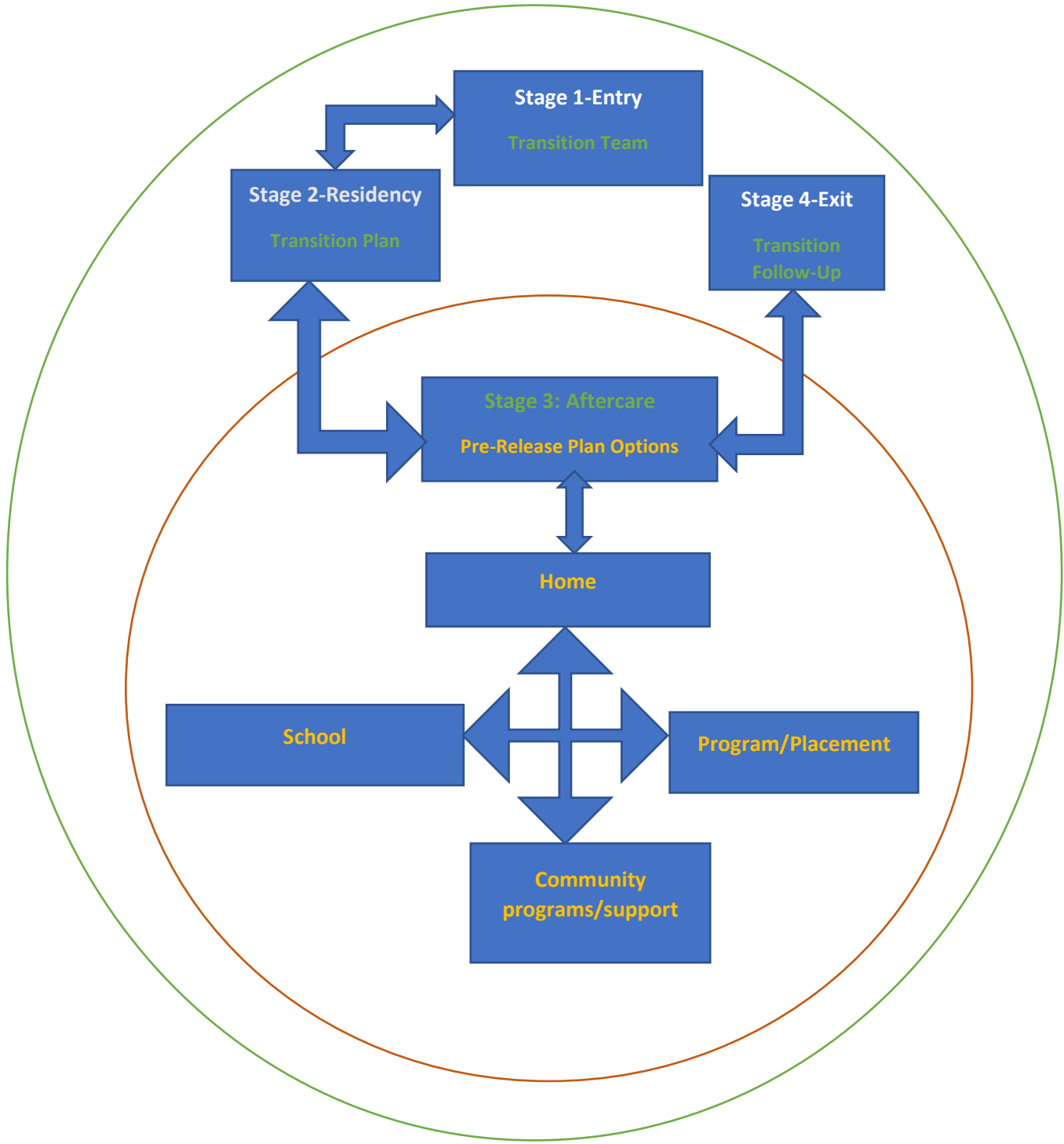
Resources needed

From the findings of all the research article reviewed, I may need funding/grant for a Transition Specialist in Hartford and Bridgeport detention centers. It will cost about \$45,000-\$55,000 per a year in each center depending on the experience and population of youth enrolled in each facility. The staff in both facilities were willing to support this proposal and completed the questionnaires with details of what is offered in each facility.

Timeline:

Date	Task
December, 2021	Needs assessment of transitional services, review articles to identify effective transitional services recommended for practice.
January, 2022	Conduct research and interview identified Domus Kids and CSSD staff on transitional services.
February, 2022	Develop a plan/Model based on findings.
March, 2022	Finalize the plan/Model for pilot at HJDC.
April, 2022	Review with Domus Kids/CSSD staff.
May, 2022	Presentation to Tow Youth Cohort 6 members.

Figure 2: Transition Pathways



References

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