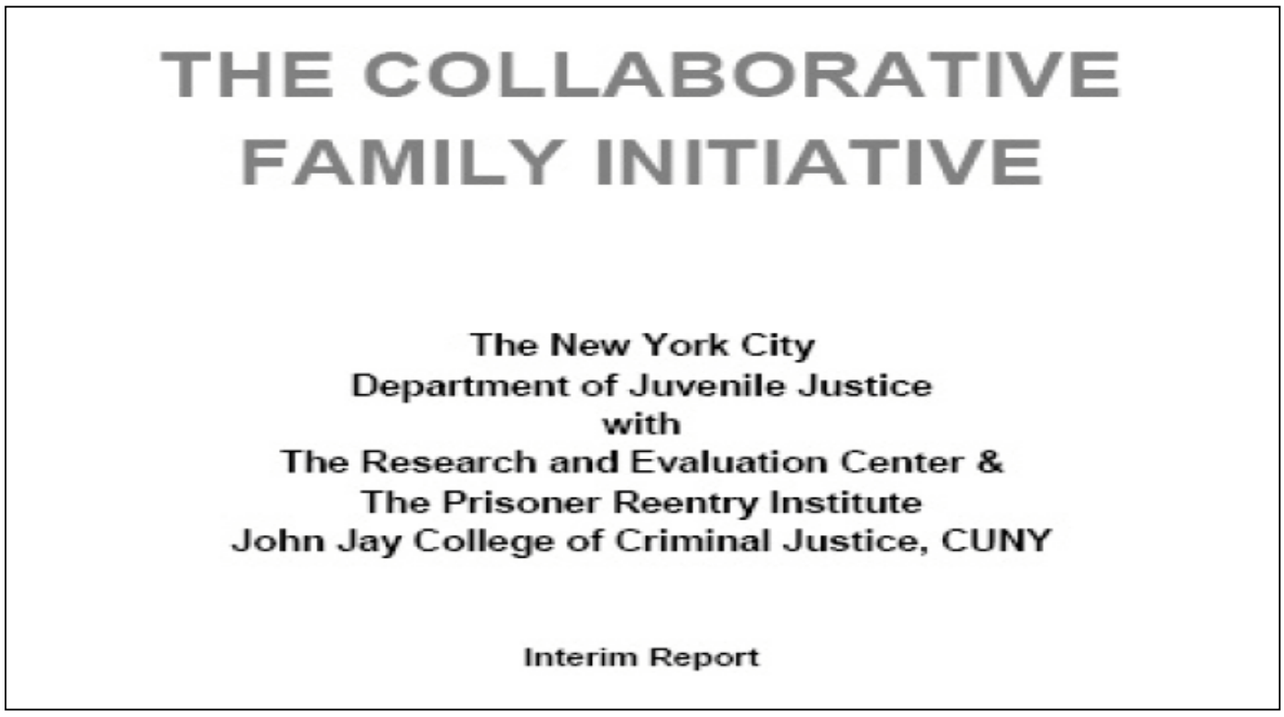

John Jay College and DJJ have released their interim report on the Collaborative Family Initiative.

CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice and DJJ Release Interim Collaborative Family Initiative Report

On Friday, May 23, 2008, the Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center and Prisoner Reentry Institute of CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) released an interim report on the Department's Collaborative Family Initiative (CFI). The report demonstrates the results of the first four months of the initiative, including participating youth receiving critical mental health services in their communities following their release from detention. CFI was announced in January 2007 to help youth with mental health problems that have been admitted to DJJ facilities for committing delinquent acts and began enrollment on February 6, 2007.

The Department has found that at initial assessment, 65% of youth admitted to detention facilities suffer from mental health needs, ranging from behavioral problems to serious mental health disorders. To address this population, DJJ implemented CFI, which allows youth diagnosed with mental health problems to return home with a parent or guardian where they will receive necessary mental health and psychiatric services from community-based partners.

As best-practice experience views the family as one of the most important supports necessary to prevent youth from reentering the juvenile justice system, the agency made cooperation between the youth, their families, and community based organizations (CBOs) providing direct support services a critical component of CFI. The Department carefully selected seven CBOs to provide direct community-based service to youth participating in CFI from all five boroughs to reflect the unique cultural differences among CFI participants.

The Collaborative Family Initiative aims to reduce the number of youth in DJJ detention facilities, while ensuring that youth released to their families receive necessary mental health treatment. The initiative also works to facilitate an easy transfer from Department facilities back into the community by helping youth reenter school and the community at-large. DJJ is continuing its work to improve CFI by working with the youth, families and CBOs to provide the best possible service to these at-risk youth.

The four-month trial period examined in the interim report culminated on June 1, 2007. During the trial period, program staff engaged more than 100 youth and their families, resulting in 62 enrollments into CFI. Attrition due to nonparticipation or judicial decisions on participation in the program reduced to 21 the number of youth actively participating in the initiative at the end of the trial period. Of actively participating youth, all were enrolled in school and 81% of were not arrested on new charges within 90 days of being released from detention.

The interim report details some of the short-term successes of CFI and makes recommendations for the future of the program. The successes include providing youth with critical community-based mental health services immediately upon release from detention, forming a committed coalition of service providers and juvenile justice experts to administer the initiative, and the demonstration that youth who remain actively engaged with CFI for at least 90 days remained in the community where they returned to an education program and demonstrated pro-social behaviors.

The authors of the report also recommend several measures to improve the program, including carefully evaluating services being provided to youth when released to the community, working to more fully engage youth and families with CFI, and examining the lower-than-expected participation of young women in the initiative. These recommendations and other ways to improve service to youth in detention have been a priority for DJJ in the time since the end of the trial period, and will remain so as CFI continues.

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