Coming back home: The reintegration of formerly incarcerated youth with service implications

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ABSTRACT

More than 100,000 youth return each year from some form of detention in a juvenile justice facility to families and communities with needs of their own. Despite information about the offense types and general demographic characteristics of detained youth, less is known about the needs and experiences of youth as they prepare to re-enter the community after a period of detention or how they fare post-release. A heightened awareness of the complex array of needs and the match between these needs and the social and educational service sector has the potential to streamline the reintegration process, with advantages for public safety, reduced recidivism, and promotion of positive youth development. This paper analyzes the needs of formerly incarcerated youth with a focus on the implications for social and educational service systems. Results suggest that intervening with youth involved in the juvenile justice system requires a coordinated, holistic approach.

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1. Introduction

Approximately 100,000 incarcerated youth have been released from the physical custody of the juvenile justice system following conviction and returned to the community with another 97,000 currently held in placement (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Youth returning to the community come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and have spent varying lengths of time incarcerated for offenses such as simple assault, drug trafficking, and stolen property. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 2008) reports general characteristics of incarcerated juveniles and arrest statistics; however, less is known about how these young people fare after they return to their communities and further, how communities can mobilize and coordinate resources to meet the needs of these young people. The difficulty many formerly incarcerated juveniles experience suggests that a number of needs persist beyond release (Bazemore & Terry, 1997). Many of these needs likely existed prior to the incarceration and played a role in the offense(s) resulting in arrest.

Youth in residential placement with the juvenile justice system may have been involved in some form of social and/or educational services prior to incarceration and may continue to receive services such as special education while incarcerated. Many youth, however, do not receive the services they need prior to incarceration or while in residential placement (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). In both circumstances, the point of incarceration holds great potential for comprehensive assessment for a range of medical, social, and behavioral needs such as mental health and substance abuse assessment.

Despite this assessment opportunity, the formal detention/ incarceration process disrupts services that may be in place and tends to complicate re-establishment of services post-release for a number of reasons. First, youth are physically removed from their families, schools, and communities. Despite the fact that some disruption may be necessary, arguably the disruption would need to lead to positive changes for the young person and the family, school, and community for the time away to be productive. Second, by the time a young person is detained, he or she likely has exhausted other options for residential placement. Formal services such as mental health services and vocational training may not be accessible and formal and informal supports such as family members, teachers, and case managers may now believe that responsibility for this young person has been relinquished to the juvenile justice system, for better or for worse. These factors present considerable barriers to the coordination of reintegration efforts.

Ideological perspectives on the role of incarceration for young people also play a critical role in the treatment of juvenile offenders. The juvenile justice system has undergone vast changes in the past 100 years, vacillating between punitive and rehabilitative models in an effort to strike a balance between keeping the community safe and rehabilitating youth. The policy cycles of punishment-oriented phases

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and rehabilitation-oriented phases can be traced back to 1820, when punitive laws led to increased occupancy in juvenile detention facilities and the resulting deterioration of rehabilitative services and safety (Jenson & Howard, 1998). The juvenile system was based on the belief that persons who had not reached the age of majority could not be held morally accountable for their crimes and needed to be protected by a separate system (similar to that of the child welfare system) with a focus on rehabilitative services (Ainsworth, 1991). However, in recent times fears about the increasing rate of juvenile crime have led states to enact increasingly punitive laws, including the trial of some youth in the adult court system (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

Across the nation, the deteriorating conditions in juvenile justice facilities due to violence and minimal attention to rehabilitation have led to scathing attacks in the forms of newspaper articles, independent reports, documentaries, and lawsuits (Bykowicz, 2008; Cannon, 2004; Fantz, 2008). As youth are released, in some areas in greater numbers due to policy changes, some of the concerns include the challenge of dealing with histories of troubled families and substance abuse, school and placement failure, numerous law violations, and mental health needs (Speirs, 2007). In addition, the "significant rise in the complexity of dysfunctional and multiple need clients" returning to home-counties impacts other local services such as child welfare and child mental health services (Clark, 2008). These concerns are echoed by district attorneys, who fear that unsuccessful local placements will compromise public safety (Lewkowitz, 2008).

Formerly incarcerated youth return to families and neighborhoods that need assistance to support them. Recidivism and public safety are clearly motivating factors for improving the outcomes of the reintegration process; however, a narrow focus on risk assessment and recidivism fails to consider the potential for youths' contributions to society and facilitation of transitions to healthy adulthood. The determination that many of these youth return to communities with increased or exacerbated needs signals an urgent call to understand the complexity of their reintegration needs and the match with current practices. In this review we synthesize and analyze research on the specific characteristics and needs of these young people with a focus on service implications. A detailed description of the search protocol for the review can be found in the Appendix.

2. Characteristics of detained youth

Detailed information regarding the characteristics of youth exiting the juvenile justice system is limited; however, some basic information can be gleaned from statistics available on currently detained youth (OJJDP, 2009). Table 1 summarizes basic demographic characteristics of youth involved in the juvenile justice system in the United States in 2006, the most recent information available from OJJDP. The majority of detained youth are male (85%; $n=78,911$), although the female offender population has shown a slight increase (Sickmund et al., 2008). The greatest percentage of youth are between the ages of 15 and 17 (72%; $n=65,981$), with a small percentage of youth under the age of 13 (1%; $n=1207$) or over the age of 17 (14%; $n=13,115$). Nationally, Black and White youth represent the majority of youth in placement (40%; $n=37,337$ and 35%; $n=32,495$ respectively). Minority youth, most notably Black youth, are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system (OJJDP, 1999).

Table 2 details the offense profiles for committed youth in the United States in 2006. The majority of youth (64%; $n=41,600$) are being held for non-violent crimes, including: 1) stolen property; 2) drug use and/or trafficking; 3) public disorder (carrying weapons or public intoxication); 4) technical violations (violations of court orders, parole and probation); and 5) status offenses (offenses applied only to juveniles such as truancy) (see Table 2). A smaller percentage of youth have committed serious crimes against persons including homicide, sexual assault, and aggravated assault (36%; $n=22,958$).

Table 1
Demographic profile of committed youth, United States, 2006.

	%	N
Gender		
Male	85	78,911
Female	15	13,943
Ethnicity		
Black	40	37,337
White	35	32,495
Hispanic	20	19,027
American Indian	2	1828
Asian	1	1155
Other	1	1012
Age		
<13	1	1207
13–14	14	12,551
15–17	72	65,981
18+	14	13,115

Note: U.S. total includes 1466 juvenile offenders in private facilities for whom state of offense was not reported and 124 juvenile offenders in tribal facilities. The "Hispanic" category includes persons of Latin American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. These persons are not included in the other race/ethnicity categories.
Source: Sickmund, Melissa, Sladky, T.J., and Kang, Wei (2008). Census of juveniles in residential placement databook. Online. Available: http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/cjrp/.

Youth are involved in the juvenile justice system in various stages of processing including commitment, detainment, and diversion. In this analysis, we focus predominantly on committed youth who have spent time in residential placement. Incarcerated youth who re-enter the community come from a variety of private and public residential facilities and enter and leave the juvenile system through a variety of

Table 2
Detailed offense profile for committed youth, United States, 2006.

Most serious offense	Percentage of committed youth	Total committed youth (N)
Person	*35.6%*	*22,958*
Criminal homicide	0.8%	503
Sexual assault	8.9%	5742
Robbery	7.1%	4612
Aggravated assault	7.8%	5030
Simple assault	8.1%	5201
Other person	2.9%	1870
Property	*26.3%*	*17,004*
Burglary	10.5%	6793
Theft	5.4%	3485
Auto theft	5.0%	3211
Arson	0.7%	464
Other property	4.7%	3051
Drug	*8.8%*	*5673*
Trafficking	1.9%	1208
Other drug	6.9%	4465
Public order	*10.7%*	*6878*
Weapons	3.6%	2314
Alcohol	0.3%	225
Other public order	6.7%	4339
Technical violation	*13.0%*	*8410*
Status offense	*5.6%*	*3635*
Running away	0.9%	574
Truancy	1.1%	709
Incorrigibility	2.5%	1586
Curfew violation	0.1%	68
Underage drinking	0.6%	396
Other status offense	0.5%	302
Total	*100%*	*64,558*

Note: U.S. total includes 1466 juvenile offenders in private facilities for whom state of offense was not reported and 124 juvenile offenders in tribal facilities.
Source: Sickmund, Melissa, Sladky, T.J., and Kang, Wei (2008). Census of juveniles in residential placement databook. Online. Available: http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/cjrp/.

pathways that may or may not include adult courts and adult correctional facilities (Mears & Travis, 2004).

3. The needs and experiences of formerly incarcerated youth

While the majority of youth in placement are 15 years of age or older, a wide range of ages and life stages are represented as illustrated by a child returning to a family and adult custody in contrast to young adults entering the adult world for the first time to "supervise themselves" (Zimmerman, 2005, p. 35). The developmental stages related to identity development, moral and social development, and the establishment of healthy relationships is combined with varying cultural and legal understandings of youth and adulthood to create a complex challenge for human service organizations to address as youth re-enter their communities (Zimmerman, 2005).

Greenberger's (1984) theory of psychosocial maturation can be used to organize the needs of incarcerated youth of late adolescence (ages 16–24). The theory includes the development of "mastery and competence, interpersonal relationships and social functioning, and self-definition and self-governance" and depends upon the type of social interaction with peers and adults within social networks often found outside of the family (Steinberg, et al., 2004, p. 24). For example, a developmentally appropriate goal for rehabilitating an incarcerated youth in late adolescence could be facilitating and mastering the transition to adulthood (vocational education, employment, independent living, and control of substance abuse issues). On the other hand, incarcerated youth in early adolescence may need more support to develop secure family, school and peer structures in order to build a foundation for the more independence-oriented goals of late adolescence (Altschuler & Brash, 2004). Research clearly demonstrates the need to address the developmental needs of youth re-entering the community (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Mears & Travis, 2004; Snyder, 2004; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Steinberg et al., 2004; Zimmerman, 2005). Youth needs can be organized into the following categories: 1) social and community; 2) educational; 3) occupational; 4) independent living; and 5) health (including substance abuse and mental health).

3.1. Social and community support

Community supports are an essential component of successful re-entry strategies, especially services to assist youth in every aspect of their social reintegration related to geographical neighborhoods, family and/or living situations, adult supports and relationships (mentors and advocates), and peer and social networks (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). It is clear that communities and neighborhoods have implications for successful re-entry as well as contributors to the offenses that led to adjudication.

A disproportionate number of youth are drawn from, and return to, a small subset of communities primarily communities of color and economically disadvantaged communities (Sullivan, 2004). Many youth are being released into communities of concentrated disadvantage, where opportunities for education and employment are limited while crime is widespread (Mears & Travis, 2004). Youth in urban settings face higher rates of re-offense, parole violations, and poor parole adjustment than their peers from suburban and rural settings due to heightened crime rates, higher caseloads for parole officers, and a lack of supportive resources for reintegration (Heilbrun et al., 2000). Returning to a high-crime neighborhood is a risk factor for recidivism and relocating to a lower-crime neighborhood can reduce the risks associated with community re-entry (Sullivan, 2004).

Youth who have established a reputation related to criminal behavior in their neighborhood may have more difficulty with successful re-entry and rehabilitation. Anderson (2000) found that a major concern of youth incarcerated in a metropolitan juvenile detention facility was the tension between their desire to get "on the right track" while maintaining their reputation in their neighborhood (p. 669). The same study indicates that while reputation may be linked to demonstrating "heart" and a "hard" appearance in the gang context, it can include the responsibility of providing economically for one's family, even if it means participating in illegal behavior. In addition to neighborhood influences and circumstances, many youth find the challenges of re-entry compounded by the presence of intergenerational poverty within their families, and living in historically under-serviced neighborhoods (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004).

In a study based on the 1987 Survey of Youth in Custody (SYC) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Snyder (2004) found that incarcerated youth are likely to come from single-parent households and have a family member who also has been incarcerated. In this study, 54% of youth lived in a single-parent household during their formative years and 10% lived with a grandparent; of the youth in the survey, 25% had a sibling who had been incarcerated, another 25% had a father who had been incarcerated, nearly one in ten had a mother who had been incarcerated, and 13% had another incarcerated relative. One in five youth reported having two or more family members who served time in a correctional facility.

Another common factor in the re-entry process is the lack of parental preparation for the changes in the behaviors of their adolescent children along with their inability to successfully intervene when their child begins to get into trouble again (Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Amrosio, 2001). The positive strides made while in the juvenile justice system may be lost upon returning to unstable family circumstances. In addition, depending on the crime for which a young person was adjudicated, returning to their home may not be possible if their parents live in public housing (Mears & Travis, 2004).

Whether or not youth find supportive adults within their own family, positive and sustained adult relationships are a key component to successful adaptation. Adult mentoring and support have been identified by young people as a key factor in the success of their own transition (Baltodano, Mathur, & Rutherford, 2005). Positive mentoring includes engagement, monitoring, consistency, confrontation, guidance, positive regard, the space to work through mistakes, instrumental support, modeling appropriate behavior, and maintaining personal connection with the youth (Baltodano et al., 2005). Studies suggest that when parents are either unavailable or unable to set limits for youth, it is beneficial for youth to have an adult in their life that is both a friend and a guide (Hughes, 1998; Todis et al., 2001). Positive adult relationships include supporting access to caring adults and effective programs to facilitate linkages between youth and staff (Baltodano et al., 2005). The development of these supportive and positive relationships is also seen as an essential component of successful youth development (Mears & Travis, 2004).

In addition to cultivating sustained adult relationships, studies have shown that positive peer influences can have an effect on transition success rates; this is especially true for youth in middle adolescence, who place great importance on acceptance and peer relations (Baltodano et al., 2005). As youth may return to peer networks that have influenced their delinquent behavior, it is important to support the creation of positive peer networks, and to include not only high-risk youth in group work but also pro-social youth (Altschuler & Brash, 2004).

3.2. Educational support

The educational needs of incarcerated youth re-entering the community include three components: 1) circumstances related to reintegration into the educational system after disruption, (Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, & Havel, 2004; Keeley, 2006; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Sullivan, 2004), 2) special educational needs related to learning disabilities (Baltodano et al., 2005; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002; Bullis et al., 2004; Keeley, 2006), and 3) the immediacy of developmentally appropriate re-engagement with

academic and/or vocational programs (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002; Bullis et al., 2004).

A number of factors complicate the transition back to educational settings for formerly incarcerated youth, including the discontinuation of specific rehabilitative services used while incarcerated to ensure successful transition back into school (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Stephens & Arnette, 2000). For example, educational plans (such as IEPs for learning disabled youth) may be incomplete or lost in the transition. The low quality of the educational supports youth receive while incarcerated may also inhibit re-entry when youth advance academically at an extremely slow rate or function at lower academic levels (Stephens & Arnette, 2000). Zimmerman (2005) found that 46.1% of youth re-entering the community within a 12-month period were operating at a grade level three or more years below the age-appropriate level. In essence, youth enter institutional settings at an academic disadvantage, fail to have their academic needs addressed while incarcerated, and then struggle to navigate the mainstream educational environment due to a lack of transitional support, often in the same under-resourced schools that lacked the ability to help them before incarceration (Altschuler & Brash, 2004).

School administrators and students may fail to understand the needs of re-entering ex-offenders and inadvertently further push them away (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). For example, overly restrictive policies do not support youth (especially during minor setbacks) or provide them with the encouragement and peer support they need to acquire skills they lacked prior to adjudication. Sullivan (2004) found that returning incarcerated youth, who already face the challenge of academic underachievement, also have their paths disrupted when incarceration negatively impacts the sequential structure of secondary education. The disruption not only affects their acquisition of knowledge and skills but also disrupts the social relationships that are formed in schools.

Although exact estimates are unclear, the predominance of youth with learning and behavioral disabilities in correctional facilities is sufficient to justify special education services as a major need of youth exiting these facilities (Rutherford, Bullis, Anderson, & Griller-Clark, 2002). Baltodano et al. (2005) point out that in the case of educational needs, youth with disabilities often return to the very same negative educational experiences that existed before they were adjudicated. In addition, former offenders with learning disabilities and operating at low academic levels acquired in under-resourced schools may be less than eager to return. Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, and Havel (2002) found that youth identified as having a learning disability were, at a 6-month time period following release, 2.8 times more likely to return to the juvenile justice system than those without diagnosed learning disabilities and 1.83 times more likely to return at the 12-month mark. Using a definition of "engagement" as a state in which youth were participating in school and/or work and had not recidivated, the authors found that youth with learning disabilities were 1.76 times less likely to be "engaged" in school than those without a disability after 6 months and 1.67 times less likely after 12 months. Early and immediate educational involvement upon release is essential to reduce recidivism during the first 12 months when most youth re-offend (Bullis et al., 2004).

Finally, immediate engagement in school appears to impact the future educational and occupational success of these youth. Bullis et al. (2004) found that those youth who were engaged 6 months following release were about 2.5 times more likely to be engaged at 12 months than those who were not engaged at 6 months. Considering over 87% of these youth were either in school or working and in school, supported reintegration into educational settings plays a critical role in promoting successful long-term reintegration into the community.

3.3. Occupational support

Closely connected to educational needs are the short- and long-term employment needs of youth as they exit residential placements.

Chronic juvenile offenders are often restricted in their efforts to become productive citizens based on limited and unequal access to education, job training, and employment (Sametz, Ahren & Yuan, 1994). Unfortunately, the environments to which youth return present a number of barriers to changing problematic behaviors including overly restrictive policies and social forces suggesting behavior cannot and will not change (i.e., once an offender always an offender). Exiting adolescents need to acquire: 1) skills; 2) credentials; and 3) real and immediate work experience—depending upon developmental stage and ecological factors—with opportunities for growth that facilitate reintegration into society (Bullis et al., 2004; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2006; Unruh, Bullis, & Yovanoff, 2003).

While employment immediately following release may serve as a deterrent to recidivism (at least during the first 6 months), employment may be more effective in facilitating a successful transition when bolstered by community and educational supports (Bullis & Yovanoff, 2006). Suggesting a positive relationship between vocational training and post-release employment, Bullis and Yovanoff (2006) found that youth who received vocational training while incarcerated were 11.62 times more likely to be employed after 6 and 12 months in the community than those who did not participate in training. For recently released youth who had the opportunity to articulate their needs, the greatest demand related to occupational training and job-related programs (GED preparation and employment searches) (Jurik, Blumenthal, Smith, & Portillo, 2000).

The developmental stages of youth re-entering the community and age-appropriate work for these youth play an important role in successful employment. Youth in early adolescence (ages 11–14) may have occupational support needs that focus more on pre-employment and basic job exploration skills related to "individualized and competency-based schooling" (Altschuler & Brash, 2004, p. 78). Youth in late adolescence (ages 18–20), however, may have immediate needs for work experience and placement along with vocational training. Youth in middle adolescence may need the approaches used for both early and late adolescence (Wilson, 2000). Bullis and Yovanoff (2006) found that ex-offender youth ages 16 and older were 2.43 times more likely to be employed after 6 months and 3.05 times more likely to be employed at 12 months than those youth younger than 16 years of age.

3.4. Independent living support for older adolescents

While there is research on developmental and/or age-appropriate assessment of the needs of juveniles exiting residential placements (see Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Mears & Travis, 2004; Snyder, 2004; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Steinberg et al., 2004; Zimmerman, 2005), there is surprisingly little research on the role of independent living skills and housing for older youth leaving the system. Altschuler and Brash (2004) suggest that while younger adolescents leaving the system may have the need to establish good family support, independent living programs may be appropriate for older adolescents "if they exist." (p. 78). A lack of independent living skills is a significant barrier to successful transition into communities, especially for young people with emotional or learning disabilities (Unruh & Bullis, 2005). In conjunction with the adjustment of living in the community, formerly incarcerated juveniles are expected to demonstrate skills that were not even possible to develop in highly structured residential settings.

3.5. Health support

Youth in residential placements are subject to a range of health problems from asthma to consequences of drug abuse because of environmental factors faced in the neighborhoods from which they came (Jarvis, Beale, & Martin, 2000). Recognizing that most youth return to the same or a similar neighborhood upon release, both the individual

youth's health needs and the larger public health issues require attention. Current research is limited in the ability to untangle health problems that youth possessed upon entry into the justice system from new health problems acquired while in residential care. While the majority of mental health and substance abuse assessments are completed as youth enter residential placements or within the first two weeks (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006), services received while incarcerated are often scarce and/or inadequate (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Desai et al., 2006).

Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Mericle, Dulcan, Washburn and Butt (2007), focusing on the mental health and substance abuse needs of youth within a single detention center, found that more than 63% of males and 71% of females in the center met the criteria for at least one of the following mental health disorders:

- affective disorder (16.1% of males, 22.9% of females);
- psychotic disorder (1.0% of males, 1.0% of females);
- anxiety disorder (20.7% of males, 28.9% of females);
- ADHD (11.2% of males, 16.4% of females);
- disruptive behavior disorder, including conduct disorders (31.4% of males, 38.0% of females); and
- substance abuse disorder (50.7% of males, 46.8% of females).

Co-morbidity of disorders was common whereby 22.5% of females and 17.2% of males were diagnosed with 3 or more disorders. Further, the researchers found that 93.2% of males and 84.0% of females reported a traumatic experience before detention and 10.9% of males and 14.7% of females were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. In general, findings suggest that the majority of youth in residential placements face a host of mental health disorders and many youth maintain a need for treatment while incarcerated that remains with them as they re-enter the community. There is a general consensus in the literature that youth with mental health disorders in need of treatment make up the majority of youth in correctional settings (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Desai et al., 2006; Snyder, 2004; Teplin et al., 2007). Wasserman, Jensen, Ko, Cocozza, Trupin, Angold et al. (2003) found that formal assessments at intake, during placement, upon release, and post-release should include mental health assessment. While some research describes populations in residential facilities, there still is a large gap in assessment for those populations re-entering the community. In a longitudinal study of boys from secure settings in England, Harrington et al. (2005) found that many youth leaving care maintained inadequately treated mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and hyperactivity that existed at similar rates before, during and after secure residential placement.

Committed youth in the United States have much higher reported involvement with drugs of all kinds than the general youth population, especially the early use of drugs and alcohol (Snyder, 2004). Watson (2004) reports that 60% of adjudicated youth in the country deal with substance abuse each year. Teplin et al. (2007) found that within detention centers, 25.9% of males and 26.5% of females have alcohol use disorders; 44.8% of males and 40.5% of females have marijuana use disorders; 2.4% of males and 6.9% of females have other substance abuse disorders; and 20.7% of males and 20.9% of females have both alcohol and other drug disorders. Using the same sample, McClelland, Elkington, Teplin, and Abram (2004) found that multiple substance use disorders (2 or more) affect approximately 50% of the detained youth population. Assessment and treatment of substance abuse disorders in recently released juvenile populations requires further attention. For example, Harrington et al. (2005) found that 60% of boys demonstrated a need for substance abuse treatment when entering secure residential placements, and the number dropped to 10% while in residential placements but increased back to 31% post-release.

In sum, a number of social and community, educational, occupational, independent living, and health concerns impact the

transition from detention to community living for recently released juveniles. As noted, at multiple points prior to incarceration social and educational services can be mobilized to reduce the likelihood that a young person will require residential placement. However, the complex nature of young people's experiences and offense histories challenges any one system's ability to intervene, particularly given the demands on educational and social services. Once a young person is incarcerated, the barriers are even greater. In the context of the role of multiple service systems, we now discuss reintegration as a multifaceted process.

4. Implications for educational and social services: Addressing the reintegration needs of formerly incarcerated youth

The complex process of community reintegration for formerly incarcerated juveniles is best represented as a process rather than a program. The re-entry process involves re-defining traditional understandings of custody and involving multiple stakeholders including parents, community groups, community members, and public and private institutions. Unfortunately, these entities have varying legal responsibilities, capabilities, and motivation levels to implement transitional services for formerly incarcerated youth (Zimmerman, 2005).

Developing and testing best practices or model community re-entry programs for formerly incarcerated youth is further complicated by the different perceptions of the process and conflicting policies impacting the juvenile justice system. These complications are shaped by three issues: 1) overlapping systems that are not well coordinated and subject to communication barriers, 2) the nature of the rehabilitative history of juvenile justice and the need for correctional programs and re-entry programs to be considered together, and 3) the recommended overhaul of the juvenile system away from institutional systems that resemble adult prisons.

4.1. Competing systems that serve youth

A complex system of interlocking and overlapping service providers has not been effectively coordinated to meet the needs of youth re-entering the community (Anderson, 2000). Even though child welfare and delinquency courts view youth differently and they are designed to address overlapping needs, there is a need to change the system as a whole rather than just focus on how social services should approach re-entry (Smith, 2005). Research from studies of incarcerated youth completing reintegration programs suggests that a seamless transition into community services through a continuum of care program can reduce the odds of youth recidivating as adults (Howell, Kelly, Palmer & Mangum, 2004; Ryan, Davis, & Yang, 2001).

Interagency infrastructures for all youth services that include community planning teams from the major human service agencies (including education, mental health, substance abuse, child welfare, juvenile justice agencies and community organizations) can develop a comprehensive strategy that includes: 1) community level assessment of risk and protective factors for delinquency and other child and adolescent problems, and 2) collaborative agency assessment of the needs of youth conducted at the local level (Howell et al., 2004). As an innovative example, Jarvis et al. (2000) report the use of interdisciplinary discharge teams to address the health needs and lack of health knowledge of re-entering youth by connecting nurses within the juvenile justice system with community liaisons that can access community health resources available to youth to create discharge plans shared with all participants.

4.2. Understanding re-entry within a larger model of reintegration

Re-entry and rehabilitation need to be goals from the moment youth enter the juvenile justice system (Gies, 2003; O'Rourke & Satterfield, 2005; Watson, 2004). With a focus on what occurs during

incarceration and upon return to the community, reintegration should attend to the ability of the offender to function within society and the impact an offender's return has on stakeholders such as family, the community with regard to safety and positive contributions, victims of the prior offense(s), and the correctional system from which the youth was recently released, including parole and post-release services (Altschuler & Brash, 2004).

However, coordinating the services needed to effectively support recently released juveniles is difficult when such services operate in separate silos. This difficulty comes from: 1) conflicting goals of control and empowerment when dealing with formerly incarcerated youth; 2) a lack of trust by the grassroots community of juvenile corrections and an overall lack of cohesion between the two groups; and 3) conflicts between the surveillance and case management goals of overworked parole officers (who might use access to the program as a reward for youth) and the programmatic goals of the community partners (who want access for all youth, especially those who might be having the most difficulty adjusting to re-entry) (Jurik et al., 2000).

4.3. Juvenile justice system overhaul

Some research suggests that the use of incarceration for juvenile offenders should be reconsidered altogether. For example, Winokur, Smith, Bontrager and Blankenship (2008) found that youth in lower risk correctional facilities with shorter lengths of stay had lower rates of recidivism and those with longer stays in low and medium risk facilities had higher probabilities for increased recidivism. Research for "high risk" facilities produced mixed results. It is difficult, however, to untangle other factors contributing to length of stay and recidivism, such as severity of initial crime and a comprehensive assessment of the offender's needs.

Bazemore and Terry (1997) call for an entire paradigm shift in juvenile justice toward a model of competency development that starts from an understanding and appreciation of the resources delinquent youth possess and operates within a youth development model that views delinquency as a normal response to their environment. This competency view differs from treatment models where youth are seen as victims or punitive models that describe them as villains. It further challenges the fundamental philosophy and goals of existing practice as it seeks to implement a "competency development agenda" (p. 704). Scholars and policy-makers recommending major revisions to the juvenile justice system generally emphasize the need for integrated services that begin prior to arrest and do not involve the complete removal of youth from support systems and services in existing communities, in effect removing the need for re-entry.

5. Conclusion

Juveniles re-entering the community after a period of incarceration, or in some cases after multiple periods of incarceration, display a number of needs that contribute to their offense history and that have serious implications for post-release success. Ideally, communities would respond prior to incarceration with preventive programs. As our review suggests, most if not all juvenile offenders require social and community support, developmentally appropriate educational and occupational services, assistance in finding housing and developing independent living skills, and services to address physical and mental health needs.

One of the major limitations of the research on the community re-entry of juvenile offenders is the overall lack of recent studies (within the last 20 years) that utilize comparative or randomized samples to: 1) document the general state of youth re-entering the community from residential and correctional placements and 2) assess the characteristics and needs before and after release. Many of the qualitative and observational studies are limited, based on non-randomized and/or extremely small samples and emphasize the need for additional experimental research. Furthermore, much of the literature refers to one longitudinal regional study that is not

representative of the adjudicated youth populations nationally (see Bullis & Yovanoff, 2006; Bullis et al., 2004; Unruh & Bullis, 2005; Unruh et al., 2003, 2004).

In addition to the need for evaluation of re-entry efforts, a number of specific populations require further study. Insufficient attention has been paid to youth from diverse cultural backgrounds and the role of cultural factors in supporting successful reintegration. In addition, incarcerated youth with learning disabilities require tailored interventions that need to be evaluated. Further, while some programs attend to the different needs of female offenders, there are insufficient re-entry and after-care programs focusing on gender-specific needs. Finally, the role of parenting in the context of incarceration and re-entry requires further study.

Once formerly incarcerated youth enter the community, it is imperative that the juvenile justice system identify the specific needs of this population in order to link them to other services. In addition to the limited resources in the juvenile justice system to provide pre-release and follow-up services, the lack of coordination of other service providers reflects the view that these young people are "not our problem" when in fact the young people returning to the community are from numerous and varied families and communities. Reintegration calls for coordinated activities among the different youth-serving agencies and the development of a new form of re-entry practice whereby providers use a systems approach to best practices that may stretch the mission of specific programs, especially to overcome ineffective communications that fail to address the multi-systemic nature of the challenges facing the community re-entry of incarcerated youth. It is clear that services before and during incarceration can have a major impact on reintegration services. In sum, the concept of reintegration and coordinated activities among the different agencies that serve youth should be promoted as a unique form of re-entry practice.

Appendix A

Search protocol

This literature review used pre-determined search sources and search terms to identify relevant research literature and reduce bias. Specified search terms were entered into multiple databases of academic and research articles from the criminology and broader social science fields. In addition, searches were conducted of government, research and policy institute websites that focus on juvenile re-entry. A snowball search was also conducted, whereby the references of articles and studies identified through the initial search were reviewed in order to identify further relevant references. The search terms and sources used are listed below.

Search terms

(re-entr* or return* or reent* or leav* or reintegrat*) and (juvenil* or youth* or adolesc*) and (offend* or delinq* or justice)(juvenil* or youth* or adolesc*) and (justic* or offend* or delinq*) and child* and welfare and cross*(aftercare or transition*) and (juvenil* or adolesc* or youth*) and (offend* or delinquen* or justic*) and communit* (juvenile* or teen* or adolesc* or youth*) and (offend* or court or delinquent*) and (correctional facil* or group or place* or resident*) and (re-entr* or return* or reent* or leav*).

Databases

Academic databases for books and articles

Family & Society Studies Worldwide (1970–January 2008), Social Works Abstracts, Complete CSA Illumina Social Science Database (ATLA Religion Database, Communication Abstracts, Communication Studies: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Criminology: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Education: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, ERIC, IBSS: International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Index Islamicus,

CSA Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts, PAIS International, Political Science: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, PsycARTICLES, Psychology: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, PsycINFO, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Sociology: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts).

Research institutes/government websites

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/.

The Urban Institute http://www.urban.org/.

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