

## The Case for Case Planning

Research summary prepared by Susan Trickett, EPIC, Colorado Division of Criminal Justice  
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The primary source for the information in this report was *Bridging Research and Practice in Juvenile Probation*, a research report compiled by the Urban Institute. I have drawn heavily on the chapter devoted to Case Planning. This chapter, which is grounded in adolescent developmental theory, provides an overview of research that explores the effectiveness of case planning as a strategy to promote long-term change in youth involved in the justice system. The chapter also includes useful guidelines on how to build an effective case plan.

### What are case plans?

*Plans are written, structured tools that direct the offender and the probation/parole agent toward targeted activities and outcomes* (Carey et al., 2020). They are different from case management, which is the process used by the agent to monitor the offender, ensure that the court order is met, and make any appropriate referrals. Carey et al. suggest that poor case management and confusion over setting priorities have led to the need for case plans. Carey et al. indicate that case plans can help set priorities, in addition to identifying particular strategies that will be most effective with an individual youth.

Case plans align with the National Reentry Resource Center's four core research-based principles for improving outcomes for youth involved in the justice system (Seigle et al., 2014):

1. Base supervision, service, and resource-allocation decisions on the results of validated risk and needs assessments.
2. Adopt and effectively implement programs and services demonstrated to reduce recidivism and improve other youth outcomes, and use data to evaluate the results and direct system improvements.
3. Employ a coordinated approach across service systems to address youth's needs.
4. Tailor system policies, programs, and supervision to reflect the distinct developmental needs of adolescents.

### Effectiveness of case plans

There is research evidence supporting the use of case plans based on risks assessments with justice-involved youth, for example:

- Enos, Richard & Southern (1996) are often cited as a source for research that shows that effective case management reduces recidivism
  - Note that this research was not conducted specifically with juveniles
- Carney & Buttell (2003) found that compared with youth who received conventional juvenile court services, youth receiving services in a wraparound model:
  - Missed school less
  - Were suspended less
  - Ran away from home less frequently
  - Were less assaultive

- Were less likely to be picked up by police
- Vieira, Skilling, & Peterson-Badali (2009) found that matching youths' identified needs with appropriate services reduced recidivism
  - However, they also found that youths' needs were actually matched with services in only 15-42% of cases (matching rates varied with the specific need)
- Singh et al. (2014) found that adherence to the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model (i.e., matching services with identified needs) was associated with reductions in adverse outcomes for youth
  - They also found that targeting youths' strengths was associated with better outcomes

### **Benefits of case plans**

- Case plans identify ways that youths' specific needs can be met (through referrals and connecting youth with services)
- Case plans increase youths' ownership of goals and plans to achieve them
- Case plans support prioritization of key activities, by highlighting main objectives and putting non-essential activities lower on the priority list
- Case plans set clear, specific and measurable targets (SMART goals)
- Case plans use data to monitor progress toward targets/goals

### **Matching case plans to youths' developmental needs**

To be effective, case plans should address the specific needs of adolescents (NRC, 2013), namely:

- Adolescents are susceptible to peer influence, impulsivity, and reward-seeking. They tend not to consider future consequences. These characteristics are a normal part of adolescent development;
- Most adolescents outgrow criminal behavior as a part of maturation, suggesting that they should be held accountable for wrongdoing in ways that don't increase the risk of their reoffending;
- Adolescents need a healthy social environment in which to develop into productive adults, comprising three critical conditions
  - Authoritative parents or adult parent figures
  - Prosocial peer affiliates
  - Participation in activities that promote autonomy and critical thinking

### **Characteristics of effective case plans**

- Based on assessment of youth's needs, using Risk-Need-Responsivity principles (Andrews & Bonta, 2010)
- Co-developed with youth AND caregivers/supportive adults
  - When youth feel listened to and respected, they are likely to behave better (Fagan & Tyler, 2005)
  - Case planners should actively listen and engage with youth in developing their case plans

- Case planners should engage parents or other supportive adults, who are critical for healthy development (Laird, Pettit, Bates, 2003; Laird, Pettit, Dodge, 2003)
- Set targeted and incremental expectations for youth
  - Adolescents struggle when faced with many requirements over long periods of time, because their brains have not yet fully developed executive functioning skills (Goldstein et al., 2016; Steinberg, 2009)
  - Set goals jointly with youth; goals should be short-term, easily accomplished, and measurable (SMART)
- Include incentives for meeting expectations and clear consequences for non-compliance (Goldstein et al., 2016; NRC, 2013)
  - Case planners should make sure that adolescents and their caregivers understand the expectations and consequences if they are not met
  - Youth need to believe that their case plan is fair; they will be more likely to comply with legal requirements in the future (Fagan & Tyler, 2005)
- Connect youth with services and interventions in their community, matched to their needs and strengths (Vieira, Skilling, & Peterson-Badali, 2009; Singh et al, 2014)

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