

A Profile of Youth in the Los Angeles County Delinquency Prevention Pilot: Highlights

In 2014, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) conducted a process and monitoring evaluation study of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Delinquency Prevention Pilot (DPP). Funding for this study was provided by the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

Background

In 2011, at the request of DCFS, the NCCD Children's Research Center developed an actuarial risk assessment for classifying the likelihood of delinquency among children receiving child welfare services in the county. DCFS then built a practice model around the risk assessment to deliver services to youth who were classified as being at high risk of subsequent juvenile justice involvement. These services were based on youth needs and risk factors related to delinquency (e.g., substance abuse, education, mental health, etc.). In the fall of 2012, DCFS launched the DPP in four offices. The current study examined the strengths and barriers to successful DPP implementation.

Study Cohorts

NCCD identified three study cohorts that represent different stages of DPP implementation and that received different levels of DPP services.

- Cohort one youth were enrolled in the DPP when the pilot began. Based on program design, these youth were to receive DPP services in addition to DCFS services provided through their child protective services case plan. Collection of service delivery data was limited for cohort one.
- Cohort two youth were enrolled when the DPP was undergoing a transition period. These youth received “services as usual” according to their DCFS case plan and no additional services as a result of DPP enrollment. Cohort two served as the comparison group.
- Cohort three youth were enrolled after the pilot reboot. Like cohort one, these youth were to receive additional delinquency prevention services, with improved data collection regarding the type of services provided.



Process Evaluation Findings

The purpose of the process evaluation was to examine implementation fidelity and to answer the question, “How well was the DPP implemented according to design?” Highlights of the process evaluation findings include the following.

Strong implementation is key to the success of a pilot of this kind.

It is important to have dedicated resources available to support program implementation. Reallocating already-limited resources toward high-risk youth may be insufficient to prevent subsequent delinquency; increasing services to meet the specific needs of this population may result in more effective program outcomes.

Valid and reliable information regarding service delivery is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the delivered services.

Short-Term Delinquency Outcomes

A comparison of outcomes by cohort showed that youth in cohort two, who did not receive DPP services as intended, had the highest outcome rates (9% for arrest and 9% for sustained petition). Youth in cohorts one and three, who were to receive DPP services, had lower six-month outcome rates. Just 7% of youth in cohort one were arrested, and 3% had a sustained petition. None of the youth in cohort three were arrested by the end of six months.

While promising, these results should be interpreted carefully given the gaps in information about

implementation fidelity at baseline and during the follow-up period. Based on other information collected, it is not clear which youth in any of the cohorts received services as intended and when; therefore, inferences from these data should be made with caution.

Recommendations for Future Implementation

Based on study findings, NCCD made several recommendations, including the following, for strengthening the DPP in Los Angeles County and for other jurisdictions wishing to implement a similar program.

- The agency must make an overall commitment to delinquency prevention by incorporating the required policy and procedure changes into its overall practice model.
- A delinquency prevention initiative requires an administrator or an administrative team with authority and resources to oversee the design and implementation.
- Links between systems should be strengthened to provide blended interventions more consistently and effectively to high-risk youth.
- Ongoing evaluation of the screening assessment, program implementation fidelity, service delivery, and outcomes is necessary to ensure program success and replication.

About the NCCD Children’s Research Center

The NCCD Children’s Research Center works in partnership with child-serving agencies to construct actuarial risk assessment instruments, design and implement decision-support and data analysis systems, conduct workload studies, and evaluate agency service-delivery programs.