

Department of Juvenile Justice
Human Research & De-Identified Case Specific Data Requests
Annual Report FY 2024

Administrative Code

On February 9, 2005, 6 VAC 35-170, *Minimum Standards for Research Involving Human Subjects or Records of the Department of Juvenile Justice*, adopted by the Board of Juvenile Justice, became effective. This Administrative Code requires the establishment of a Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) and sets out the conditions required for approval of external research proposals. The Administrative Code was most recently revised on June 24, 2021. Select sections of the regulations are included below to provide an overview of the review process:

6VAC35-170-130. Human Research Review Committee

A. In accordance with § 32.1-162.19 of the *Code of Virginia*, the department shall establish an HRRC composed of persons of various backgrounds to ensure the competent, complete, and professional review of human research activities conducted or proposed to be conducted or authorized by the department. No member of the HRRC shall be directly involved in the proposed human research or have administrative approval authority over the proposed research except in connection with his role on the HRRC.

6VAC35-170-150. Committee review of human research proposals.

In reviewing the human research proposal, the HRRC shall consider the potential benefits and risks to the human subjects and shall recommend approval only when:

1. The benefits to the human subjects outweigh the risks;
2. The methodology is adequate for the proposed research;
3. The research, if nontherapeutic, presents no more than a minimal risk to the human subjects;
4. The rights and welfare of the human subjects are adequately protected;
5. Appropriate provisions have been made to get informed consent from the human subjects, as detailed in 6VAC35-170-160;
6. The researchers are appropriately qualified;
7. The criteria and means for selecting human subjects are valid and equitable; and
8. The research complies with the requirements set out in this chapter.

6VAC35-170-50. Conditions for department approval of external research and data requests.

A. The department may approve research projects and data requests only when it determines, in its sole discretion, that the following conditions have been met:

1. The department has sufficient financial and staff resources to support the request, and, on balance, the benefits of the request justify the department's involvement;
2. The request will not interfere significantly with department programs or operations, particularly those of the operating units that would participate in the proposed research; and
3. The request is compatible with the purposes and goals of the juvenile justice system and with the department's organization, operations, and resources.

6 VAC 35-170-190. Committee reports required.

A. In accordance with § 66-10.1 of the *Code of Virginia*, the HRRC shall submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the director at least annually a report on human research projects approved by the HRRC and the status of such research, including any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.

B. The HRRC also shall submit annually to the Board of Juvenile Justice the same report as required by subsection A of this section.

Human Research Review Committee

During fiscal year (FY) 2024, the Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) HRRC was comprised of members from various backgrounds. The following members were active as of June 30, 2024:

- Nina Hyland (Chair) – Research Manager, DJJ*
- Robin Binford-Weaver, Ph.D. – Director, Behavioral Services Unit, DJJ*
- Lara Todd – Records and Legal Support Manager, DJJ*
- Rebecca Westfall – Policy and Legal Support Coordinator, DJJ*
- Betsy “Katie” Baldacci – Probation Officer I, 9th Court Service Unit, DJJ*
- Will Egen – Policy Analyst, Virginia Commission on Youth
- Rebecca Smith, Ph.D. – Program Manager for Undergraduate Research, Institute for Research on Behavioral and Emotional Health at Virginia Commonwealth University
- Erin K. Maloney – Superintendent, Northwestern Regional Juvenile Detention Home

*Members also served on the internal sub-committee that reviewed de-identified case-specific data requests.

DJJ Senior Research Associate, Peter Gregory, Ph.D., served as the Coordinator of External Research.

In addition to reviewing the human subjects research studies as defined in the Administrative Code, an internal sub-committee reviews requests for de-identified case-specific data, including those made through the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS) where DJJ is the sponsoring agency. The following report includes projects involving either human subjects research or de-identified case-specific data.

During FY 2024, the Deputy Director of Community Programs and the Superintendent of Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center placed a hold on the review of new human research proposals due to the need to focus on other agency priorities. During the year, DJJ approved one de-identified case-specific data proposal, and, as of June 30, 2024, two other de-identified case-specific proposals were under review. The following sections summarize the twelve studies that were active during FY 2024, including those approved in prior years and/or closed this year, as well as the two proposed/pending studies. (Amendment dates indicate the most recently approved amendment; several projects involve multiple amendments over the course of the project.) The Research Unit also reviewed five VLDS studies in which DJJ was not the sponsoring agency. These studies are not included in the report.

In accordance with § 32.1-162.19, *Human research review committees*, an executive summary of completed projects can be found in Appendix A. One project was completed in FY 2024.

I. Active Studies

Evaluation of a Comprehensive Community-Level Approach to Youth Violence

Researchers: Derek Chapman and Diane Bishop

Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: November 28, 2017; amended January 28, 2020

Most Recent Progress Report Received: November 30, 2023

The purpose of the study is part of a larger project aimed at learning more about youth violence in low-income neighborhoods of Richmond, Virginia. The researchers will examine retrospective, de-identified data for youth between the ages of 10 and 24 who were associated with an intake case at Richmond City Court Service Unit (CSU) between January 2012 and December 2019. The researchers requested data on intake decisions, youth demographics, offense information, Detention Assessment Instrument (DAI) ranking, select Youth Assessment & Screening Instrument (YASI) items, length of stay (if applicable), and recidivism rates. Since the researchers are interested in low-income neighborhoods of Richmond (e.g., Mosby Court, Gilpin Court, Creighton Court) they requested individual block-level geographical data. The researchers trained the DJJ Research Unit staff on how to clean and geocode the data manually. The researchers identified the variables they need from DJJ, and the data and the data dictionary were delivered to the study's researchers in July 2020. The researchers reviewed the data, and data analysis and reporting is underway. The researchers plan to ask for the remaining data (2020 and 2021) and expect to complete this study in FY 2025 after the data are obtained, analyzed, and described in an updated fact sheet. The researchers are coordinating with the Research Unit to establish a more exact timeline.

Exploring Perceptions of Juvenile Court Service Personnel: Do Cognitive-Communicative Skills Impact Outcomes for Juvenile Offenders?

Researcher: Allison Chappell

Institution: Old Dominion University

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: December 9, 2021

Most Recent Progress Report Received: December 15, 2023

The purpose of the study is to examine CSU staff's views on the relationship between youth's communication skills and the legal process, including outcomes and decision-making. Existing research found that nearly half of juvenile offenders have a cognitive-communicative disorder that can impact their ability communicative effectively and appropriately. The researcher gathered qualitative data at CSUs 2 (Virginia Beach) and 4 (Norfolk) on staff and other stakeholder's views on cognitive-communicative impairments and their impacts. Data analysis is ongoing, and the researchers expect to submit a final report by the end of FY 2025.

OJJDP Juvenile Justice System Reform Initiative: Virginia

Researcher: Rebecca Cohen

Institution: Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: November 15, 2022

Most Recent Progress Report Received: February 23, 2024

The purpose of this study is to support DJJ in conducting a comprehensive assessment of the “front-end” (e.g., diversion and intake) of Virginia’s juvenile justice system. The assessment will identify system strengths and support DJJ in coming to consensus on opportunities to better align system referral, screening, and diversion policies, practices, and funding with what research shows works to improve community safety, improve youth outcomes, and reduce disparities. The qualitative and quantitative assessment phases of this project are complete. Findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis were included in a presentation to the DJJ Director on June 28, 2023. CSG Justice Center staff are providing continued technical assistance to the DJJ for the recommendation and implementation phase of the project.

Research on Juvenile Reoffending

Researcher: Zachary Hamilton

Institution: Nebraska Center for Justice Research, University of Nebraska – Omaha

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: August 31, 2022

Most Recent Progress Report Received: August 6, 2024

The purpose of this study is to examine YASI risk and needs profiles in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, family structure/type, rural and urban settings, and poverty. The study aims to advance the researcher’s original work in a previously approved project by analyzing additional variables. The original study examined data from 10 states’ risk assessments and identified advancements for state, agency, or youth-specific gender responsiveness and outcomes. In addition to the main goals, the researcher will provide DJJ with a state recidivism comparison, a task which DJJ’s Research Unit is unable to complete due to various barriers that the researcher can overcome with direct access to other states’ data. The researcher requested data from FY 2015-2021, to include risk assessment, demographic, offense history, treatment need, supervision location, case management, and recidivism data. Data cleaning was initiated in 2023, prior to merging with data from other states included in the study. Next steps will involve data analysis and coordination with DJJ to ensure the proper use and interpretation of the data.

Identifying Variation in Juvenile Judicial Sentencing

Researcher: Karen Kitchens

Institution: Virginia Tech

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request through VLDS

Approval Date: October 19, 2022

Most Recent Progress Report Received: February 20, 2024

The purpose of this study is to use existing BADGE and VLDS data to identify if variation in sentencing exists, and if so, which sentencing/programs lead to the best outcomes. The study population is juveniles in the state of Virginia who interacted with the court system as identified through the BADGE system during the years 2010 to 2020. To account for changes in the court system as a result of COVID-19, the study does not include juveniles whose first encounter with DJJ occurred after the start of the pandemic. In 2023, the researchers received data, created basic models, and met with the members of the Research Unit to determine the plausibility of adding judge-level information to the VLDS system. Next steps involve finalizing models and utilizing models as a proof of concept for grant funding.

Process Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Regional Service Coordinator Model

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: August 10, 2018; amended August 26, 2022

Final Report Received: September 6, 2024 (See Appendix A)

The purpose of the study was to conduct an in-depth evaluation of DJJ's Regional Service Coordinator (RSC) model by conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews with CSU staff, RSC staff, and youth as well as analyzing administrative data. The study had three primary objectives: (i) conduct a process evaluation of the RSC model to understand the extent to which it is being implemented as intended; (ii) provide an initial assessment of the extent to which implementation of RSC model is associated with youth outcomes; and (iii) translate and disseminate findings to target audiences, such as DJJ, other systems that are interested in similar models, and stakeholders. The researcher conducted 17 interviews with direct service providers and 14 focus groups with CSU staff. The researcher worked with the Deputy Director of Community Programs to increase recruitment efforts with the CSU staff. The researcher was unsuccessful in recruiting youth to be interviewed. In addition, after some outreach assistance from DJJ, the researcher paused judge interviews due to COVID-related limitations.

Rigorous Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's Second Chance Act Reentry Reform

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: October 30, 2019; amended May 24, 2023

Most Recent Progress Report Received: August 16, 2024

The purpose of the study is to conduct an evaluation of DJJ's reentry reform efforts. The researcher aims to examine (i) the extent to which DJJ is implementing the recommendations developed during the Second Chance Act Juvenile Reentry Reform Planning Grant, (ii) the extent to which the agency's services align with the youth's needs, (iii) what the youth's participation in reentry services look like, and (iv) how the implementation of the reforms have impacted youth outcomes. The evaluation will be conducted over a four-year period, including a pilot period. The evaluation includes focus groups with various stakeholders, such as DJJ's reentry advocates, parole officers, juvenile correctional center (JCC) counselors, and more. The researcher also created a VLDS data request to examine long-term outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system, which was submitted and approved as a separate project proposal. Next steps involve continued coordination with DJJ to analyze relevant data and determining key themes from interviews and focus groups.

Rigorous Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's Second Chance Act Reentry Reform (VLDS)

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request through VLDS

Approval Date: October 19, 2022

Most Recent Progress Report Received: August 16, 2024

The researcher is conducting an in-depth evaluation of DJJ's Second Chance Act (SCA) reentry reform efforts to better understand the quality of implementation and effectiveness. This multi-year evaluation is already ongoing. The purpose of this project is to add VLDS data to the ongoing analysis to investigate educational outcomes through data matched with the Department of Education. Next steps involve continued coordination with DJJ to obtain and analyze relevant data.

Analysis of DAI in Fairfax County

Researcher: Courtney Porter
Institution: Marymount University
Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request
Approval Date: March 15, 2024

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the public safety impact of the Detention Assessment Instrument (DAI) in Fairfax County. The public safety impact will be examined by looking at the rates of new offenses and failures to appear in court for the youth released or under various forms of community supervision as detention alternatives. The researcher notes that it is important to reassess that the instrument continues to be used correctly with minimal bias. The researcher is requested data from FY 2013-2022, to include intake, demographic, DAI, and offense data. The researcher has been sent the data and is in the process of analyzing the data.

National Juvenile Court Data Archive Project

Researchers: Melissa Sickmund and Sarah Hockenberry
Institution: National Center for Juvenile Justice
Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request
Approval Date: August 15, 2022; amended February 6, 2023
Most Recent Progress Report Received: August 6, 2024

This study is not a traditional research study. Rather, its purpose is to contribute data to an archive that creates national estimates of juvenile court delinquency, status offenses, and case processing. Historically, DJJ has participated in the data archive project; however, due to revised internal processes, the HRRC requested an updated amendment packet for consideration, which it subsequently received and approved. Data for calendar year 2023 were provided to the Archive project in March 2024. Archive staff are currently working on a grant proposal to renew the project. Next steps include submitting a request to DJJ to release aggregate counts for cases disposed in 2024 for the Statistical Briefing Book and working with DJJ staff to renew the transfer agreement to cover the award cycle of a new grant.

Juvenile Delinquency and Adult Gun Sales: Comparative Effect of Different Minimum Age Standards for Firearm Purchase

Researcher: Jeff Swanson
Institution: Duke University
Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request
Approval Date: August 19, 2020
Most Recent Progress Report Received: August 4, 2023

The purpose of the study was to conduct a comparative analysis of three southern states with different laws regarding juvenile delinquency records and the minimum age standards for gun sales. The researcher selected three states that have differing thresholds for the minimum age of gun purchase for people with juvenile criminal records. By working with multiple state agencies, the researcher planned to conduct a longitudinal comparison of gun-related adverse outcomes in order to provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the minimum-age standards in preventing gun violence and suicide. After recurring delays, this project was canceled by DJJ on May 16, 2024.

Optimizing Supervision and Services Strategies to Reduce Reoffending: Accounting for Risks, Strengths, and Developmental Differences

Researcher: Gina Vincent

Institution: University of Massachusetts Medical School

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: December 30, 2021; amended May 10, 2022

Most Recent Progress Report Received: December 29, 2023

The purpose of the study is to (i) identify which risk and protective factors are most strongly associated with reduction in recidivism to inform supervision practices, (ii) examine which services and supervision practices facilitate positive youth development and reduce reoffending, and (iii) assist with capturing data regarding protective factors, service usage, and reoffending to inform decision-making. The researcher requested archival data from 2015-2017 to serve as a baseline, to include risk assessment, demographic, offense history, case management, service, and recidivism data. The researcher also requested prospective data from five CSUs, which are piloting a protective factors survey for comparison purposes and to understand how services impact youth outcomes. After receiving the data, the researchers shared a brief summary of key study findings with DJJ in July of 2024. The researcher anticipates the project will be completed by December of 2024, following analysis of the final wave of recidivism data.

II. Proposed / Pending Studies as of June 30, 2024

Prevalence Estimation of Co-occurring Disorders in Juvenile Justice Facilities

Researcher: Ashlin Oglesby-Neal and Sarah Aukuamp

Institution: Urban Institute

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: Pending

The purpose of this study is to estimate the prevalence of youth with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders (COD) in select state juvenile justice residential facilities and examine disparities in diagnoses and treatment by race and ethnicity. The study has three main objectives: 1) determine the prevalence of youth with COD in particular juvenile justice residential facilities in five selected states over a multi-year period, as determined by a clinical assessment; 2) examine variation in prevalence rates by race and ethnicity and other demographics, time period, and agency facility type through statistical analyses; and 3) assess the approaches, attitudes, and perceptions of juvenile justice agency staff and behavioral health professionals in identifying and treating youth with mental health and substance use disorders via a process evaluation. The proposal for this project is currently under review.

The Trauma to Prison Pipeline: Exploring the Nexus of Childhood Adversity, the K-12 Education System, and the Risk of Incarceration

Researcher: Charol Shakeshaft and Dana Ainsworth

Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: Pending

This study proposes an expansion of the school-to-prison-pipeline metaphor to include discussion of the intersection of childhood adversity, student behavior in schools, exclusionary discipline, and the heightened risk of incarceration. The research aims to highlight the role of schools in mitigating or mediating the impact of adversity and the socioeconomic variables that increase the risk of trauma exposure. The proposal for this project is currently under review.

III. Denied Proposals

No research proposals were denied during this fiscal year. Projects withdrawn by the researcher are not included in this report.

IV. Administratively Closed Proposals and Studies

Administratively closed proposals and studies include proposal packets the Coordinator of External Research or the HRRC reviewed, but the agency did not hear back from the researcher(s) after providing feedback and/or requesting revisions. They also include studies for which no significant progress has been reported and for which DJJ determined it could not continue to provide resources. One research proposal was administratively closed during this fiscal year.

Juvenile Delinquency and Adult Gun Sales: Comparative Effect of Different Minimum Age Standards for Firearm Purchase

Researcher: Jeff Swanson

Institution: Duke University

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: August 19, 2020

Most Recent Progress Report Received: August 4, 2023

The purpose of the study was to conduct a comparative analysis of three southern states with different laws regarding juvenile delinquency records and the minimum age standards for gun sales. The researcher selected three states that have differing thresholds for the minimum age of gun purchase for people with juvenile criminal records. By working with multiple state agencies, the researcher planned to conduct a longitudinal comparison of gun-related adverse outcomes in order to provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the minimum-age standards in preventing gun violence and suicide. After recurring delays, this project was canceled by DJJ on May 16, 2024.

Appendix A: Executive Summaries of Completed External Projects

Note: Executive summaries are completed by the researchers, and the content is not revised by DJJ.

Process Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Regional Service Coordinator Model

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: August 10, 2018; amended August 26, 2022

Final Report Received: September 6, 2024

Project Summary

In 2017, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) initiated the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model as part of its broader Transformation Plan. The primary goal of this initiative was to establish a statewide continuum of community-based services and alternatives to incarceration for youth involved in Virginia's juvenile justice system. The RSC model aimed to reduce reliance on restrictive interventions, increase service availability, and address disparities in service access between rural and non-rural areas.

To support this transformative effort, DJJ partnered with Child Trends to conduct a comprehensive six-year process evaluation. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of DJJ in implementing the RSC model and to assess how it affects service delivery and outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Child Trends' evaluation of the RSC model focused on assessing four key aspects of the model's implementation: Adherence to the model; Quality of implementation; Service access and youth participation; and Youth outcomes.

The study had four core research questions:

1. To what extent is the RSC model being implemented as intended? If changes have been made, why were they made?
2. To what extent are the services provided to youth aligned with their needs?
3. What does youth participation in the services received through the RSC model look like?

How, if at all, are youth outcomes associated with implementation of RSC Model?

Methodology and Data

Child Trends adopted a utilization-focused evaluation approach to conduct the evaluation—an approach designed to support evidence-informed decision-making by fostering a close partnership between the evaluator (Child Trends) and the intended users of the evaluation results (DJJ). To ensure that the evaluation served DJJ's specific needs, Child Trends actively involved DJJ in all phases of the evaluation process.

Child Trends employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the RSC model. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus groups with key partners, including Court Service Unit (CSU) staff, Regional Service Coordinators (RSCs), judges, and direct service providers. Unfortunately, Child Trends was unable to recruit youth to participate in this study, which was a significant limitation. Quantitative data included administrative datasets regarding youth background characteristics, Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) data, and youth participation in RSC model-funded programs and services.

Study Findings

Overall, Child Trends found that the implementation of the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model has been a pivotal shift in Virginia's juvenile justice landscape. This change required the coordinated adoption of a complex, statewide systems-change intervention across a diverse array of organizations and partners, including state-level authorities such as the State Assembly, the governor, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), local Juvenile & Domestic Relations courts, Court Service Units (CSUs), the Central Admission and Placement (CAP) Unit, Regional Service Coordinators (RSCs), and various contracted direct service providers. Given the complexity and range of entities involved, some variation in the adoption and implementation of the model was anticipated.

Key findings from the study are summarized below. For a comprehensive account of the findings, see the study's final report (Murphy et al., 2023).

Implementation Success: The RSC model, which integrates multiple partners across autonomous agencies, has largely operated as intended. This success persisted even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Efficiency and Improved Service Access: CSU staff praised the model's efficiency in connecting youth with services, reducing administrative burdens, and increasing the range of services available to youth and families. The pandemic-induced shift to telehealth has also enhanced service accessibility—a practice that both DJJ and RSCs plan to sustain moving forward.

Collaboration and Funding: The model fostered improved collaboration and trust among stakeholders, particularly RSCs and CSU staff. Guaranteed funding streamlined service initiation and referrals, addressing previous uncertainties and administrative delays.

Responsive Improvement and Challenges: The RSC model demonstrated adaptability to feedback, especially in streamlining referral processes. However, several implementation challenges arose, including initial knowledge gaps among judges and service providers regarding the model's purpose and implementation; concerns about the continuation of services post-supervision; and ongoing skepticism and limited buy-in from judges.

YASI Implementation: The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) is central to the RSC model, helping standardize goal setting and case planning and creating a “common language” among different stakeholder groups. However, concerns were raised about its comprehensiveness. Further discussions with DJJ revealed the availability additional tools and resources, indicating a need for better awareness, support, and training among staff.

Service Expansion and Efficacy: The model significantly expanded the number and range of services available to youth and families, particularly evidence-based programs such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT). High approval and initiation rates for service referrals were also observed. However, challenges with service availability persisted, particularly for youth and families in rural areas, non-English speakers, and youth transitioning from direct care placements.

Recidivism Rates and Service Impact: Recidivism remains a challenge, with rearrest rates of youth who have received one or more services funded through the RSC model reaching 37.5% within 12 months and 52.2% by 24 months. However, completing at least one RSC-funded service significantly reduced the likelihood of rearrest and reconviction, underscoring the importance of service engagement. Specifically, youth who completed a service had 29% lower odds of being rearrested (OR = 0.71, $p < .01$) and 33% lower odds of reconviction (OR = 0.67, $p < .001$) within 12 months of service initiation.

Recommendations

The shift to the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model marks a significant advancement in Virginia's approach to juvenile justice, focusing on community-centered practices that prioritize rehabilitation and support over punitive measures. The insights from this study offer a valuable framework for other states seeking to transform their juvenile justice systems. Continued commitment to implementing the recommendations from this study will be essential for ensuring sustainable impact and ongoing improvements in the system.

Based on the evaluation findings and identified limitations, we propose the following recommendations to enhance the implementation and impact of the RSC model:

- **Strengthen Supervisory Support:** Engaging supervisors more actively in the implementation process can provide Court Service Unit (CSU) staff with focused guidance, helping ensure adherence to policies, procedures, and greater awareness of resources, such as assessments and tools that complement the YASI.
- **Enhance Communication:** Initial communication challenges between Regional Service Coordinators (RSCs) and CSU staff were overcome through additional outreach, community-building, and sharing evidence of program effectiveness. In addition to these efforts, RSCs also built trust by adapting procedures based on CSU staff feedback. These initiatives should be continued and extended to judges, many of whom expressed skepticism or misunderstandings about the RSC model. Although some resistance may persist, much of it can be mitigated with an inclusive, participatory approach that respects professional judgment while clearly conveying the rationale behind the change, supported by research evidence.
- **Incorporate Youth and Family Perspectives:** A key gap in the evaluation was the absence of direct input from youth and families affected by the RSC model. DJJ should prioritize including these perspectives in future assessments and program improvements. Youth and family feedback is critical for understanding participation barriers and ensuring services are aligned with their needs.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** By 2022, a rigorous quality assurance process was established to monitor and enhance the quality of direct service providers funded through the RSC model. Ongoing internal performance monitoring as well as external research partnerships are vital for identifying areas of improvement and strengthening the model.
- **Address Disparities in Service Access:** The evaluation revealed disparities in service access, particularly for youth released from direct care, those in rural areas, and non-English speakers. DJJ should develop targeted strategies to ensure equitable access to services, focusing on overcoming barriers specific to these communities. This may involve expanding resources in underserved areas and enhancing cultural responsiveness in service delivery. Thoughtfully engaging youth and families in identifying and addressing these barriers is crucial to overcoming this challenge.

Conclusion

Through innovative financing, data-driven strategies, and collaboration, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model offers key lessons for states transitioning to community-centered treatment models. Virginia's approach, focused on reducing incarceration and increasing local investment to address service disparities, engaged a wide range of

stakeholders, including policymakers, probation offices, the judiciary, service coordinators, and community providers.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, our evaluation of the RSC model yielded positive results and practical recommendations for juvenile justice reform. The model has demonstrated its potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of community-based treatment services, with a significant link between completed services and reduced recidivism. For sustained impact, it is essential to continue internal performance monitoring—disaggregating data by youth demographics to ensure equity—and foster external research partnerships. These steps will help the RSC model evolve into a more equitable, efficient, and impactful system. Virginia’s shift to the RSC model represents a major advancement in youth justice reform, emphasizing the importance of community engagement and trust-building among stakeholders. This model holds the potential to inspire similar transformations in other states, benefiting both youth and their communities.

Disclaimers

This project was supported by Grant # 2017-JF-FX-0062 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and was transferred to and managed by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

Further, the findings of this study are the responsibility of the researchers, and cooperation by the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice in facilitating this research should not be construed as an endorsement of the conclusions drawn by the researchers.

Finally, portions of this report received copy editing support from OpenAI’s Chat GPT, a machine learning model. While Chat GPT assisted in refining the text for clarity and readability, the content, analysis, and conclusions presented in this report are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of OpenAI.