



Research Spotlight

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STAFF

Lynette E. Holmes
Deputy Secretary of Support Services

John Irvine
Director of Research & Evaluation

DeVon Bailey Fang Qian

Patricia Elmore Urjita Rami

Oneika Ford Claire Souryal-Shriver

Susan Nicely Marci Stables

Falguni Patel

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By: DeVon Bailey, Oneika Ford, and Susan Nicely

Layout Design: Susan Nicely

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JUVENILE RE-ENTRY

“The process was good. I’m glad to be going home and they are giving me the chance at doing right.”

A youth who recently transitioned home after a committed placement

INTRODUCTION

Re-entry is defined in the dictionary simply as, “the act of returning to a place, organization, or area of activity that you have left.”¹ In the world of juvenile justice, however, the concept is anything but simple. It means transitioning youth back to their communities following a period of confinement. This process involves many elements both within and outside of the system including mental, behavioral, and somatic health, educational services, and family support. All parties must come together to provide the best chances for the youth to be successful and not return to the system.

When a juvenile initially enters a period of confinement, everyone understands that at some point the youth will be re-entering the community from which they came. While this idea represents a myriad of opportunities, it also can be extremely complex for juvenile justice professionals. How can they best serve the youth, the family, and the community while instituting real change that will last? This is where the process of re-entry comes into play.

Presented in this report is a description of the process used to develop the re-entry strategic plan, an explanation of the re-entry process itself, and a breakdown of the re-entry strategic plan’s five goals incorporating data measures where appropriate.

RE-ENTRY STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The development of a comprehensive re-entry strategic plan was part of an in-depth effort to reform the Maryland juvenile justice system. This effort has led to refinements in policies to better structure decision-making and case management practices at all levels of the system. DJS’ initial focus was on the “front door” of the system by analyzing the reasons for detention, validating the detention risk-assessment instrument (DRAI), and reserving detention resources for youth shown to have higher risk to public safety. Diverting lower-risk youth out of detention can reduce their chances of deeper penetration into an out-of-home commitment. As such, DJS reinvigorated its existing Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) in Baltimore City by having administrators, expeditors, and committees populated by agency stakeholders closely monitor youth detention decisions. The rest of the state followed the City’s lead by internally adopting the JDAI principles to ensure only the most at-risk youth are considered for detention.

Considering the success of the front door initiatives, the next population for reform was that of committed youth. DJS improved the processes for evaluating the risks and needs of adjudicated youth for more effective case planning and restructured the process for developing treatment recommendations to the juvenile court. A formalized risk and needs assessment was developed and validated in partnership with the University of Maryland. The process used for youth in detention at risk of committed placement was changed to be facilitated by Multi-Disciplinary Assessment and Staffing Teams (MAST). The teams

“I want every child to get the best. I look at each one of them as my own children, and I know I would want my child to receive the best.”

--DJS Program/Education Transition Specialist

include case management, behavioral health, and committed staff who review, assess, and make unified recommendations to the juvenile court. DJS also expanded its social worker workforce and hired staff psychologists to be strategically stationed at detention centers statewide.

The development of a re-entry strategic plan followed a similar approach of analyzing issues and developing a structured decision process for youth released from committed placements. Since the Federal Second Chance Act of 2008 had greatly increased the national focus on juvenile re-entry issues, DJS reviewed the existing best-practices and strategic planning models for re-entry. Ultimately, DJS decided to conduct an agency-wide strategic planning retreat, bringing the Department’s community and residential administrators as well as case managers together with agency stakeholders. Representatives from the Judiciary, Office of the Public Defender, States Attorney’s Office, service providers, and the advocacy community came together with DJS at the retreat.

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was used for the group to develop targeted recommendations for better re-entry planning. The retreat audience was broken out into large, professionally diverse groups facilitated by DJS administrators in order to review the following critical re-entry domains:

1. **Public Safety** – youth and community;
2. **Housing** – permanency and stability;
3. **Education and Employment** – supportive services while in

commitment and transition into the community;

4. **Family** – wrap around approach for the family as a whole;
5. **Behavioral Health** – supportive services while in commitment and transitioning to the community;
6. **Somatic Health** – supportive services while in commitment and transitioning to the community;
7. **Interests and Recreation** – developed during commitment and supported as an integral part of re-entry; and
8. **Financial Obligations** – ensuring victims are made whole.

Recommendations and results from the SWOT analysis were organized for integration into a comprehensive re-entry strategic plan. The critical domain sections of this report were developed over a period of several months by a team of agency staff, front-line managers, and administrators working with youth and managing staff in committed facilities and on community supervision. Additionally, operational meetings were held with regional and residential stakeholders to ensure compliance with any public safety concerns.

In order to actually implement this working plan, a focused coordination of effort was required. Therefore, DJS conducted staff trainings, and re-deployed six case managers as dedicated re-entry specialist positions for all six regions, who could oversee implementation of the plan action items.

A key part of the implementation was the development of checklists to be used prior to and after release. These checklists served a number of key functions:

1. To structure the re-entry planning process, insuring that all key domains were considered and covered by the discharge plan.

2. To identify specific services or connections that an individual youth will require. Does he/she need to be re-enrolled in school or already have a GED and is in need of employment? Does the youth have any medication, housing, or any other service needs, etc.
3. To capture process and outcome data for key plan measures. The ability to count which youth needed which services, and who actually received those services is critical to evaluating both the success of the youth and success of the re-entry planning initiative as a whole.

The checklists were developed for use at different points of the re-entry process and were implemented on the Google platform. This allows case managers access within each region and allows data to be collected and analyzed centrally. The post-discharge checklist is completed by case managers 30-days after release and captures key performance measure data such as whether medication was made available, service connections were made, school re-enrollment was accomplished, etc.

After an extensive planning and development process, the re-entry strategic plan was implemented in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. The goals identified in the plan are:

- Goal 1: Reduce recidivism by providing supervision to all youth returning home from committed care.
- Goal 2: Engage families of committed youth at all key case planning decision points.
- Goal 3: Connect all committed youth needing educational services to local education resources.
- Goal 4: Connect all youth to local employment services and resources.

- Goal 5: Connect all youth in need of behavioral or somatic health services to local resources to provide continuity of care.

RE-ENTRY PROCESS FOR YOUTH

At DJS, the time to start planning for re-entry begins at the point of initial placement. When a youth enters detention after adjudication while pending a hearing, DJS staff work to identify the youth's needs. In each of the six regions, staff have been designated to serve as re-entry specialists. These specialists assist community case managers and residential staff with advance discharge planning, post-discharge follow-up, and any other associated tasks throughout the youth's placement and aftercare.

While the youth is in his/her placement, tentative discharge dates are recorded and modified as needed within DJS' youth tracking database, ASSIST. Community case managers and re-entry specialists work closely with the treatment team, case manager, social worker, or other staff assigned to the youth in the program's care in order to identify mutually agreeable tentative discharge dates. These dates are determined based upon each youth's progress toward meeting program goals and expectations required for successful discharge. It is essential that these dates are kept current in ASSIST because they trigger alerts to staff regarding important milestones. No later than 45-days prior to the tentative discharge date, the system alerts staff that additional planning efforts need to begin.

Once the youth is 45-days from tentative discharge, DJS staff will complete a checklist. The checklist ensures that any identified needs will be addressed upon discharge including education, career development, mental and ongoing somatic health treatment. This includes coordination of services within the community to ensure a smooth transition.

When a youth reaches the point where he/she is 30-days prior to discharge, additional re-entry events begin. A pre-discharge staffing will occur at the facility. Case managers, a resource specialist, the re-entry specialist, and the youth's parent/guardian are required participants in the staffing and the youth may participate if desired. To address potential logistical difficulties, the youth's parent/guardian is invited to participate either in person, by phone, or video conference. The 45-day checklist is utilized during this staffing and provides relevant information needed for re-entry service planning. The case management specialist/supervisor will also schedule a home visit during the staffing that will occur prior to the youth's discharge date.

After the youth goes home, the next milestone for re-entry occurs after 30-days. At this point, the re-entry specialist completes the post-discharge checklist and the assigned case manager conducts another home visit. The purpose of these follow-up activities is to ensure that services have been properly initiated including enrollment in a local school/GED program, continued mental health treatment, and any required medication is being continued. In addition to the checklist and home visit, at this point, the re-entry specialist will complete a family engagement survey via phone with the parent/guardian. This survey asks the parent/

guardian about their thoughts regarding the re-entry process and determines their understanding and participation in the process.

GOAL 1: Reduce recidivism by providing supervision to all youth returning home from committed care

The first goal identified in the re-entry strategic plan focused on recidivism. Recidivism is often the primary measure of success in the world of criminal justice so naturally it needed to be considered a top priority when transitioning youth out of placement and back to their communities. Simply put, reducing recidivism helps to create safer communities. While that concept is simple, it is not so simple to determine how to actually reduce juvenile reoffending. DJS decided that there were a few areas to examine:

1. Youth need to be supervised according to their assessed level of risk to public safety upon return to the community
2. The average length of stay on aftercare needed to be reduced

The first area considers the idea that each youth is an individual with individual supervision needs. When youth are returned to their community, they are assigned a level of supervision determined by their assessed risk level, setting the frequency of contact they have with their aftercare supervisor. DJS determined that

6-, 12-, and 36-Month Juvenile and/or Criminal Justice Recidivism Rates for FY 2014-2016 Releases from Committed Programs

Follow-up Period	FY2014 (N=1,338)			FY2015 (N=1,142)			FY2016 (N=980)		
	Rearrest	Re-conviction	Re-incarceration	Rearrest	Re-conviction	Re-incarceration	Rearrest	Re-conviction	Re-incarceration
6 Months	30.9%	12.0%	9.5%	30.3%	10.5%	7.6%	33.4%	N/A	N/A
12 Months	45.4%	20.9%	16.4%	44.5%	18.8%	13.4%	46.7%	N/A	N/A
24 Months	61.7%	31.8%	24.7%	61.4%	26.9%	17.9%	N/A	N/A	N/A
36 Months	67.6%	34.2%	26.2%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

the process of matching the youth’s needs with the level of supervision required is a critical one. Inappropriate levels of contact can influence the youth’s potential for success. It is a delicate balance and one that needs to be handled appropriately in order to provide an environment where the youth can truly succeed and ultimately not reoffend.

The second area centers on the idea that aftercare services are intended to keep youth performing well and also to help them not reoffend. If youth are engaged in services and doing well, the length of stay on aftercare can be reduced and this can correlate to a reduction in recidivism. The reduction is not due to a lack of supervision, but rather it is due to successful youth outcomes.

In any discussion of reducing recidivism, the bottom line is an examination of the actual reoffense rates. DJS does an extensive annual analysis of recidivism rates for youth released from committed programs that presents rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration rates overall and by program. (For more detailed rates and explanations of methodology, please refer to the FY 2017 Data Resource Guide².) The process of measuring recidivism rates involves following a cohort of youth released in a given year and tracking any new arrests and subsequent court dispositions. There is a two-year lag in order to allow for the extensive court processing time for new offenses. On page 3, there is a table that presents the three measures for releases from FY 2014-2016.

- Between FY 2014 and FY 2016, the 12-month rearrest rate increased 1.3 percentage points.
- Between FY 2014 and FY 2015
 - The 12-month reconviction rate decreased 2.1 percentage points
 - The 12-month reincarceration rates decreased 3.0 percentage points

Since the re-entry strategic plan went into effect in 2016, recidivism rates need to be examined again after more time has passed.

GOAL 2: Engage families of committed youth at all key case planning decision points

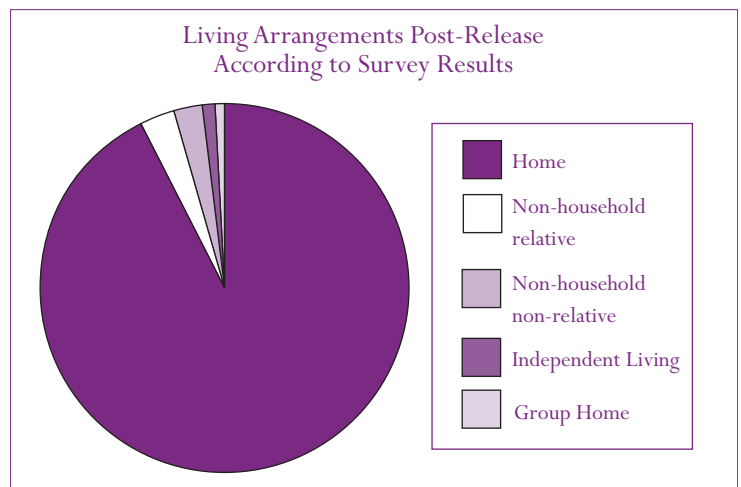
The second goal identified in the re-entry strategic plan was focused on family engagement. DJS understands that the population it serves will, in the majority of cases, be returning home to their families. Therefore, the family can play a key role in supporting the youth in his/her effort to not reoffend. DJS increased its efforts to ensure that families of committed youth are involved at all key decision points. This process gives youth and their families the opportunity to establish a clear understanding during the DJS commitment period as well as the re-entry process.

While the youth is in a committed program, DJS provides monthly family engagement activities in which the youth and their families are encouraged to participate. These activities include financial planning to understand saving and finances; motivational speakers to inspire to greatness; and hands-on activities where youth can create tangible items with their families while creating positive memories. The goal of these activities is to help build stronger communication and relationships and to connect youth and families with resources and opportunities they can utilize while transitioning back to their community. Parents/guardians are encouraged to participate in key aspects of the re-entry planning process to insure that they understand all of the steps and time frames. Involvement also provides them with an opportunity for direct input in the process before the youth returns home.

- During the quarter when the plan began (April - June 2016), 57% of families participated in the main re-entry planning meeting.
- In the most recent quarter (October - December 2017), the percent attending has risen to 83%.

Family engagement is essential, but can be difficult to measure. In order to address this, DJS developed and deployed the Re-entry Family Engagement Survey intended to gauge family satisfaction. The survey is a series of nine questions that families are asked via telephone by a re-entry specialist. The questions attempt to gauge the family’s level of understanding at every point in the re-entry process as well as whether families felt that they were informed all along the way. The Family Engagement Unit utilizes the responses to track how well families are doing in the re-entry process and to determine how well DJS is doing in providing information to families. Since the survey’s inception:

- 100% of families have been given the survey and all have responded
- 96.3% of families report feeling informed during the commitment and re-entry process.
- The survey also revealed the living situations for the youth upon re-entry (see graph below for cumulative survey results).



For those youth who do not return home to their families, re-entry remains a critical component of their potential success. On average, approximately 7.5% of youth require an alternative living arrangement upon release. Alternative living arrangements are defined as a group home, independent living facility, non-household relative, and non-household non-relative. For these youth, DJS has determined that the critical measure of success is whether or not they can remain in sustainable housing 30-days after discharge.

- During FY 2017, 92.5% of the youth who needed alternative living arrangements remained in sustainable housing 30-days post-discharge.

GOAL 3: Connect all committed youth needing educational services to local education resources

The third goal identified in the re-entry strategic plan focused on educational services. Education in the life of a young person is critical and youth involved with DJS are no different. DJS and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) work together to develop and implement juvenile educational programs at all residential facilities. In 2014, the MSDE Juvenile Services Education System (MSDE JSES) was created. This system maintains cumulative education records for each committed youth (including immunization records) and the information is used to establish an education plan that will be followed during his/her time in the program. While youth are in residential facilities, they can earn a high school diploma by earning credits or passing their GED. The MSDE JSES curriculum is based on the Maryland State College and Career Readiness Standards and includes grade level instruction in English, Social Studies, Math, and Science. Middle school coursework and remediation for high school students is offered as appropriate and youth with an Individualized Education

Plan (IEP) are provided any required services defined in their IEP.

Not all youth released to the community require enrollment in a local school. The pre-discharge checklist identifies youth who need to be re-enrolled so specific tasks can be undertaken to ensure success. When a youth is within 30-days of release from a committed program, an email is sent to the transition team informing them of the need for a school assignment. This team consists of case managers, an educational liaison, somatic and mental health staff, the youth, and the family. The team considers the youth's age and credits earned in order to make the best recommendation for the youth. Consideration is also given as to whether the youth will return to a local school or an alternative education program such as a GED. Most GED programs in the community do not have open and continuous enrollment. If the youth's date of return to the community does not correspond to the enrollment schedule, or if the MSDE JSES deems the youth an appropriate candidate based on age, youth can actually be tested while in a DJS facility.

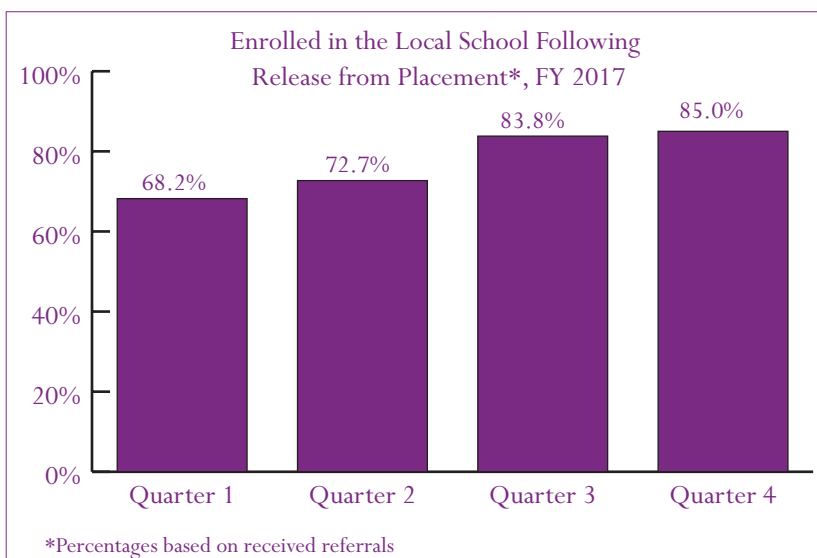
For those youth who will return to a local school, they do so with the support of the transition team. The MSDE JSES will provide the transition team with an enrollment packet that includes: education records, student performance, report cards, immunization records, progress reports, all individualized plans, statewide assessment scores, transition/post high school plan, and

Career Technology Education (CTE) certificates. The transition team coordinates with the local school system to expedite enrollment. Once the community school assignment is confirmed, the enrollment packet is sent to the receiving school to facilitate the enrollment process. The parent/guardian is notified of the record transfer to the school and is given a copy of the records at the transition team meeting. It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to physically take the youth to school, provide the school with proof of address, and complete the school enrollment documents. Since the transition team makes all initial contact and provides records, the process is much simpler for the parent/guardian.

FY 2017 is the first full year of the re-entry strategic plan's implementation, therefore it should be considered a baseline for analysis.

- In FY 2017, 86% of referrals received by the transition team prior to release from a committed placement required re-enrollment in local schools.

While it is important to consider how many needed to be placed back into local schools, it is even more important to consider how many actually were enrolled following their discharge (see graph at the top of the page for results).



- For those who needed to be placed back into local schools in FY 2017, the percentage of youth who were enrolled increased from 68.2% in the first quarter to 85.0% in the fourth quarter.
- In FY 2017, for the youth who were released from placement and were returning to local schools:
 - It took an average of 5 days for 191 youth to be enrolled in local schools.
 - It took an average of 31 days for the remaining 140 youth to be enrolled in their local schools. Re-enrollment for these youth took longer due to schools being on summer break or holidays.
- In FY 2017, there was an 80.9% increase from the first quarter to the fourth quarter for the percentage of youth pursuing post-secondary educational resources that are linked to those resources.

GOAL 4: Connect all youth to local employment services and resources

The fourth goal identified in the re-entry strategic plan was focused on youth career development and meeting restitution obligations. For a youth heading back into his/her community, one element that can play a critical role in success is employment. “Employment status is another strong predictor of criminal behavior. Individuals who have a job are less likely to commit crime, as evidenced by the findings in numerous studies on the subject.”³

One of the challenges for the juvenile justice system is how to provide job readiness training for the population that is age-appropriate while giving them skills they can use in the real world. To address this, DJS has developed a multi-faceted strategy to assist the youth. Once youth enter the re-entry transitional planning process, they are given a “Forward Thinking Re-entry Planning Journal”. This is an evidence-based tool that provides opportunities for youth to discuss and plan their future goals. A journal is not only given to the youth, but also to the

facilitator who guides discussions, makes recommendations, and helps participants in one-on-one or group sessions. The facilitator is able to follow along with the youth in the journal and create activities to help youth understand how to make better choices. The journaling process assists youth in making positive changes to thoughts, feelings, and

“I felt informed during the re-entry process. We had a plan for when my child came home so it made for a smooth transition because we had services set up in the community.”

--A parent in Cecil County

behaviors targeting areas of education as well as interpersonal skills.

In addition to the planning journal, youth participate in regularly scheduled group sessions and complete an online assessment to evaluate career interests. Group sessions utilize the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) Career Exploration website. These elements help to identify career goals aligned with each youth’s individual skills, interests, and values.

In addition to helping youth develop job readiness skills, DJS also assists with job seeking skills. Youth are connected to the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing & Regulations (DLLR) Workforce Exchange website. This is a powerful job seeker/workforce services system, accessed as a website on the Internet or an Intranet at a OneStop Center. The Exchange provides fast access to countless resources for DJS youth preparing to enter the workforce while they are in placement and upon return to the community. Resources include: resume building, job listings, a repository of youth related career information, educational services, and community service opportunities. Youth who already have a GED or high school diploma are given the opportunity to register as a job seeker on the Maryland Workforce Exchange six months prior to release. DJS provides employment readiness services to all youth while they are in a committed placement even if their discharge plan is focused on school reenrollment.

The pre-discharge checklist specifically identifies youth for whom employment is an immediate goal upon release and finding employment will be an explicit component of their discharge plan.

Another critical component of education transitioning is access to post-secondary educational resources. Post-secondary education resources include universities, colleges, institutes of technology, trade schools, and other career training programs that award academic degrees or professional certifications. Post-secondary opportunities are available to JSES high school graduates system-wide through a partnership with Frederick Community College (FCC). Enrollment to FCC will follow JSES students upon return to their home communities.



Students in an Algebra and Geometry class at Victor Cullen Center.

- During the first full year of plan implementation, 21.1% of these youth were employed within thirty days of discharge.

The second part of the fourth goal focuses on restitution. Many juveniles will transition back to their community with a court-ordered restitution needing to be satisfied. The case management specialist assigned to monitor supervision will discuss restitution orders with the youth and his/her parent. Together, they will develop a payment plan if one was not already determined by the court. Once a plan is in place, the case management specialist will monitor compliance with the payment plan. This process insures that all parties involved understand the restitution payment procedure and that the youth will be able to satisfy the requirements set by the court.

GOAL 5: Connect all youth in need of behavioral or somatic health services to local resources to provide continuity of care

The fifth goal identified in the re-entry strategic plan was focused on youth with behavioral or somatic health needs. An unfortunate reality in the world of juvenile justice is that many of the youth served have extensive behavioral and/or somatic health needs. While youth are housed with DJS, needs are determined, services/treatment are provided, and the youth is monitored. When he/she transitions back to the community, however, it can be much more difficult to ensure adherence. There is often a delay in receiving services and/or medications between the time of release and the time when the youth is seen by the necessary service providers. This delay can be caused by several factors including lack of medical insurance, limited access to service providers, and limited numbers of qualified providers in the youth's home community.

“A strong network of communication between DJS field staff and residential staff is key. When everyone isn’t on the same page, there is room for error.”

--Executive Director for Community Services

These challenges can cause frustration for the youth and family and create obstacles for potential success. DJS has identified three important focal points:

1. Youth with ongoing behavioral health needs are connected to community-based service providers prior to discharge;
2. Youth with ongoing somatic health needs are connected to community-based services prior to discharge; and
3. Youth with prescribed medication transition to the community with an adequate supply of medication or prescription that can be filled by a local pharmacy.

The pre-discharge checklist identifies specific behavioral health, somatic health, or medication needs that are required to be addressed in each youth's individual discharge plan.

Connections to local service providers begin during placement and are made through different methods. The youth may have already been seeing a service provider prior to commitment, and can return to the same provider upon re-entry. If the youth requires initiation of services upon re-entry and the intended service provider is already a vendor used by DJS, the resource specialist makes a referral and the case manager will complete the process. If the intended service provider is not a current vendor with DJS, the recommendation can come from anyone and the case manager will then follow-up with the family to make sure the connections are made successfully.

If a youth transitions home with required medications, DJS has developed a process that allows him/her to have a 30-day supply upon release. The intention is that this 30-day supply will allow the youth the necessary medication while waiting for the initial appointment with

a local provider. Since implementation of the re-entry strategic plan, there has been an increase in youth who are leaving with the 30-day supply of medication.

- Prior to implementation (4th quarter of FY 2016), 76.6% of youth left with a 30-day supply of their medications.
- In the 4th quarter of FY 2017, 81.5% of youth left with their medications.

CONCLUSION

The re-entry process is a critical component in DJS' quest to help youth to not reoffend. While it is a complicated process, its importance should not be undermined by the challenges it represents. DJS has developed and implemented a full re-entry strategic plan to help guide the entire process from the day a youth enters its care. With proper implementation and dedication to its intentions, DJS can truly endeavor to help these youth turn their lives around and become productive citizens in their communities.

ENDNOTES

¹ Re-entry. [Def 1]. (n.d.). In Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved March 2018, from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/re-entry>.

² Data Resource Guide FY 2017. Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. Baltimore, MD: December 2017.

³ Youth Reentry Task Force of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (2009). Back on Track: Supporting Youth Reentry from Out-of-Home Placement to the Community.

Maryland Department of Juvenile Services
Division of Support Services
One Center Plaza
120 West Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
www.djs.maryland.gov