

Collaboration in Juvenile Justice: A Multi-Agency Study

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FELD (1998, p. 510) contends that in the 1970s, the juvenile court changed from “an informal rehabilitative agency into a scaled-down second-class criminal court for young offenders.” Countering this trend, since the 1990s, community programs developed to provide non-adversarial, multi-disciplinary approaches to deal with juveniles. Butts and Mears (2001, pp. 169–170) write that “even while policy makers were passing new policies to ‘get tough’ other parts of the juvenile justice system were being re-invented,” including “enhanced coordination and collaboration among juvenile justice and social service agencies.” This alternative approach allows juveniles to remain in their communities and receive coordinated processing (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008; Skowryra & Coccozza, 2007) and offers treatment options such as multi-systemic therapy (Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Swenson, Henggeler, Taylor, Addison & Chamberlain, 2009), accountability-based sanctions or restorative justice (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2001), graduated sanctions (Terry, VanderWaal, McBride & Van Buren, 2000), and early intervention (Malmgren & Meisel, 2004).

Many states have invested in “intra- and inter-agency collaboration” (Butts & Mears, 2001, p. 192) to deliver programs and services to turn juveniles away from further offending. Okamoto (2001, p. 6) adds that “inter-agency collaboration is considered an essential component towards effectively serving difficult multi-problem adolescents,” and that it has “become an essential process for meeting legal

mandates as well as clinical expectations.” In this paper, we describe the results of an evaluation of a collaborative effort among several agencies responding to juvenile offenders.¹ We focus on the experiences of individuals representing agencies that participated and provide insight into the strengths and limitations of this approach. Our findings highlight areas of concern needing attention by entities and individuals contemplating multi-agency partnerships in juvenile justice.

Collaboration in Juvenile Justice

Collaboration has two distinct meanings: its first definition involves individuals or groups working together with some end purpose in mind; the second, often used in a military or wartime context, is the act of willfully cooperating with an enemy. When discussing two or more agencies that are working together to solve social problems, or to provide a product or service to members of the public, the first meaning of collaboration is typically invoked (Gray, 1989). Kraus (1980, p. 11)

¹ The evaluation formally considered two broad issues: first, an assessment of the committee’s effectiveness in meeting the intent of the legislation with regard to juvenile offenders, and second, an examination of how the committee functioned collaboratively. In this paper, we focus primarily on the second matter given the significance that is attached to collaboration in the literature and the importance that committee members attached to it themselves. We do discuss how a determination of the committee’s “effectiveness” in terms of its legislative mandate was arrived at.

defines collaboration among organizations as “a cooperative venture based on shared power and authority. It is non-hierarchical in nature. It assumes power based on a knowledge or expertise as opposed to power based on role or function.” Henneman, Lee and Cohen (1995, p. 104) add that “collaboration is frequently equated with a bond, union or partnership, characterized by mutual goals and commitments.” These attributes and outcomes are much sought after when agencies deal jointly with juvenile offenders.

The juvenile justice field is replete with calls for community-based treatment that involves multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approaches for responding to youth who come into contact with the system. Models for doing so have been suggested by Bruner (1991); Tapper, Kleinman, and Nakashian, (1997); Rivard, Johnson, Morrissey, and Starrett (1999); as well as Lane and Turner (1999). Collaboration is seen as a way to provide juveniles and their families with a broader range of services that may be more cohesive and efficient than the traditional separatist approach where agencies acting as discrete entities contact a juvenile (Andrews, Zinger, Hodge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990; Hawkins, Catalano & Associates, 1992; Crime & Justice Institute, 2004; Jenson & Potter, 2003; Nissen, Merrigan, & Kraft, 2005; Stathis & Martin, 2004; Terry, VanderWaal, McBride, & Van Buren, 2000). The literature suggests that given the complexity of juvenile justice issues, a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency approach

that brings in expertise from a variety of fields has potential for successful outcomes for juveniles who have already entered the system. However, despite the potential benefits of such a team, the structure can be time- and resource- intensive, and emotionally draining (Rivard, Johnson, Morrissey, & Starrett, 1999). A multi-disciplinary team may be composed of representatives from (among others) the juvenile court, the prosecutor's office, defense attorneys, probation officers, youth corrections officials, mental health professionals, social service providers, and representatives from cities, school districts, and law enforcement (Baker & Sutherland, 2009; Crime & Justice Institute, 2004; Feely, 2000; Leone, Quinn, & Osher, 2002; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995). Leone, Quinn, and Osher (2002, pp. 3–4) write that “[e]ffective collaboration can help agencies develop approaches and programs that emphasize and foster positive behaviors”; they conclude that by working together, “rather than temporarily removing offenders from society, they serve to maximize the potential of all young people to become productive law abiding citizens, thus creating a safer society in which to live, work, and raise a family” (p. 30). Feely (2000, p. 18) argues that a collaborative committee is likely to acquire “tremendous formal and informal authority” and be able to produce action, rather than merely serving as an advisory board.

Lane and Turner (1999) note that funding agencies “encourage” collaboration by privileging juvenile justice programs that follow such an approach, but literature evaluating these programs is equivocal. White, Fyfe, Campbell and Goldkamp (2001, p. 507) cite the importance of “intensive cooperative efforts between school and police ...in identifying troubled youth” as part of a school district's anti-truancy program in California. Jones and Sigler (2002) describe partnerships forged between the police and juvenile probation officers in Florida enforcing curfews that resulted in reductions in offending. However, Stein, Garcia, Marley, Embree-Bever, Unrein, Burdick, Fishburn and Garrett (1992) use their findings based on data from Colorado to add a note of caution to the celebration of collaborative programs. The high-risk juveniles they studied did not exhibit significant behavioral changes after participating in such a program. Worrall (2004) also shows that funding for collaborative juvenile crime prevention programs “was associated with little to no overall reductions in arrests for felonies, misdemeanors,

and status offenses” among various California counties. Therefore, although collaboration has become a watchword for organizations charged with administering juvenile justice programs, claims of success about the strategy are not universal. Given continued exhortations favoring collaboration, the “paucity of research concerning multi-agency collaboration in the area of juvenile justice is disturbing” (Worrall, 2004, p. 474).

The literature is particularly limited when considering the experiences of agencies and individuals who participate in these multi-agency collaborations in juvenile justice, the focus of this paper. There are some exceptions (Lane & Turner, 1999; Hellriegel & Yates, 1999; Okamoto, 2001; Smith & Mogro-Wilson, 2008), in which these experiential issues are examined formally. Describing the implementation of a collaborative juvenile program in Ventura County, California, Lane and Turner (1999) do adopt a broad “lessons learned” approach based on the experience, but do not focus on the perceptions of the participants and the agencies they represent.

Hellriegel and Yates (1999) describe how a treatment center and a public school system collaborated to serve the needs of juveniles. They interviewed 12 school district employees (principals, teachers) and 10 correctional staff members (supervisors, direct care providers) and designated seven themes that emerged from their discussions. Three of the seven pertain directly to the issues that we are studying: inter-agency collaboration, inter-agency communication, and cross-agency knowledge.² The authors report that “collaboration varied in terms of degree and quality” (Hellriegel & Yates, 1999, p. 61), and that there was a “need for increasing the levels of trust, communication and collaboration between the two organizations” (Hellriegel & Yates, 1999, p. 73). All school and juvenile agency personnel reported shortcomings in the nature and amount of information available to them from the partner agency. Further, Hellriegel and Yates (1999, p. 66) found “a general lack of understanding” in terms of knowledge about work of the “other” agency. Since only two agencies were involved here, such deficiencies

² The other four themes are transition plans, parental involvement, correctional facility education program development and implementation, and special education and related services (Hellriegel & Yates, 1999). While these are important substantive areas for juvenile treatment, given that they bear less directly on the modalities of inter-agency collaboration, we do not discuss them further here.

may be exacerbated the more entities become involved in a collaborative effort.

Okamoto (2001) studied collaboration among agencies responding to “high risk gang youth.” He conducted eight qualitative interviews with personnel representing prevention, case management, counseling, and residential treatment agencies. He grouped the data into three “nodes”: “the purpose of inter-agency collaboration, the elements contributing to successful inter-agency collaborations, and the elements that negatively impacted inter-agency collaborations” (Okamoto, 2001, p. 10).

Helping juveniles by incorporating the knowledge of others was the major motivation for collaborating. Successful collaborations were characterized by cooperation among those working together, particularly outside of the respondent's own agency, along with communication that included the airing of differing agency philosophies. At the same time, negative collaborations involved five patterns: “diffusion of responsibility or ‘passing the buck,’ blaming other agencies for the failures of youth, ‘covering up’ mistakes made in assessment or treatment, and prematurely terminating collaborative arrangements” (Okamoto, 2001, p. 12). The author suggests that “agency fear”—i.e., concerns that staff members have about providing resources to high risk gang members—might be the underlying element in generating negative collaborative patterns.

Smith and Mogro-Wilson (2008) assess collaboration between child welfare and substance abuse agencies quantitatively using surveys completed by 20 administrators and 216 staff members in 20 agencies. They find divisions in how collaboration is perceived between the front-line staff and administrators and also between organizations. They conclude that “even when pro-collaboration policies are adopted by child welfare and substance abuse treatment agencies, such policies may not be sufficient to promote inter-agency collaboration” and may depend on “particular staff practices” (Smith & Mogro-Wilson, 2008, p. 21).

In summary, the literature on juvenile justice collaboration, while still sparse and only beginning to encompass multiple agencies working together, has generated three major questions. First, does a relationship exist between collaboration and success in achieving the objective that brought agencies together? Second, what do participants perceive regarding their experiences engaging in these efforts? Finally, what do participants think are the strengths and drawbacks of the

multi-agency collaboration approach to juvenile justice that are being promoted?

Program Setting

This paper describes a recent evaluation of a county-level juvenile justice program designed to coordinate various agencies and to ensure that the agencies collaborate to provide supervision and services to juveniles in the system. The authors were contacted and requested to gather information regarding the efficacy of the program and to assess the functioning of the Juvenile Justice Committee, hereafter referred to as the JJC. The JJC, one of several such committees in the state where this study took place, was created as a result of a legislative mandate to the juvenile justice system that stressed better outcomes for juvenile offenders. Specifically, the committee was created to address problems within the juvenile justice system, find ways to help juvenile offenders positively transition out of the system, and maintain the juveniles in the community while concurrently protecting the latter. The JJC's group composition was consistent with the structure suggested in the literature, with members drawn from the court (e.g., the magistrate for the juvenile court), defense and prosecuting attorneys' offices, law enforcement (especially officers assigned to local schools), state, county, and city officials, school officials, and mental health and social work professionals.³ Members of the general public were also eligible to serve on the committee, but no private citizens attended meetings or sought to become part of the group during this study.

Underlying the creation of the JJC was the idea that the collaborative model would provide juveniles with a combination of supervision and behavior modification that would help them become productive members of society while allowing them to stay in their communities. This particular program used a team-orientation approach to achieve the best possible outcome for juveniles who entered the system. These juveniles were either "pre-adjudicated" (in the system without a formal sentence) or "sentenced" (serving formal sentences imposed on them by the court). Once in the system, the juveniles were either "in residence" (living in a juvenile facility) or they were "non-residents" who lived at home with their behaviors monitored by "trackers." These trackers generally oversaw the juvenile's

behavior by maintaining contact with the juvenile's school, work, and parent(s), and performed surprise home visits that might include urinalyses and breathalyzer tests. In some cases, electronic monitoring devices, e.g., electronic ankle bracelets, further tracked the juvenile's behavior.

Under the state mandate, if law enforcement arrested or detained a juvenile, that individual would be "screened," i.e., interviewed and processed into the system. The authorities who made the initial contact with the juvenile had considerable discretion as to whether the juvenile officially entered the system, was taken home with a warning, or was released. If a juvenile was detained, she or he would be screened to assess what level of supervision was needed based on the seriousness of the offense and his or her background (e.g., previous encounters with law enforcement). The juvenile would then be assigned to a treatment facility, a secure facility, or returned home with some type of additional supervision. Early in the screening process, the initial placement could be changed through an "override." That is, the initial assignment could be changed and the juvenile could be redirected to a more secure facility, to a less secure facility, or to home with supervision, depending on a variety of factors including a lack of appropriate alternatives, local policy requirements, screener's judgment, level of risk, input from probation officers, and input from the magistrate. In addition, a set of available programs focused on mental health were provided by area professionals. The programs included options identified in "best practices" (e.g., multi-systemic therapy) and provided assistance to the juveniles and in many cases, their families. The mental health professionals maintained detailed records of who entered treatment, left treatment before completing, and finished treatment. In most cases, however, there was no information regarding the juveniles once they separated from the program.

Additional programs were provided for the juveniles through a community organization that contracted with the JJC to provide services referred to hereafter as "Children's Home or CH."⁴ Among programs provided through CH were alcohol and other drug classes, a physical activity component, and tutoring; in this case the alcohol and other drug classes also matched with best practices discussed

in the literature. Interestingly, however, no mechanisms were in place to assess either the effectiveness of these programs or the individuals in charge of the CH, an absence which resulted in incomplete records with virtually no record of attendance or even which of the programs offered the juveniles attended.

Between 300 and 400 youths were typically screened each year. In 2005, for example, 349 youth were screened for placement in the juvenile justice program. Of those 349 youth, 93 of the 349 initial screenings (26.7 percent) resulted in overrides; 48 of the 93 (51.6 percent) went to a more secure facility; and 45 of the 93 (48.4 percent) went to a less secure facility. Of the 48 juveniles who were sent to a more secure facility, 8 of the 48 overrides (16.7 percent) occurred because of a lack of appropriate alternatives and 40 of the 48 (83.3 percent) were changed because of local policy or at the discretion of others in the process, frequently the magistrate. Of the 45 individuals who were moved to a less secure facility, 4 (8.9 percent) were moved because of the lack of a suitable alternative and 41 (91.1 percent) were changed because of local policy or at the discretion of others, again most often the magistrate (JJC Tracking Documents, 2006).

Methods and Data

Our program evaluation (Weiss, 1998) began by considering the literature on juvenile justice collaboration. This was followed by informational meetings with key committee members to determine program components that the members identified as integral to program outcomes and to decide on a research design. We then began attending monthly committee meetings and interviewing individual committee members to determine how goals were set and how the JJC operationalized and measured the goals. Although the initial focus of the evaluation was on outcome (i.e., did juveniles behave as envisaged by the legislation that set up the program), it became clear during the study that committee members and constituent agencies were concerned with the degree of success various entities had in "working together" i.e., collaborating. Therefore, we observed the committee's workings, identified how it functioned, and provided suggestions for improving its operations with regard to its mission of both rehabilitating juvenile offenders and protecting the community. This paper will focus on the question of collaborative committee functioning but will, for contextual and discursive reasons, provide information about program outcomes briefly.

³ To ensure and preserve confidentiality and anonymity, we do not identify participants or the agencies they represented.

⁴ The name Children's Home (or CH) was created for this paper to protect the anonymity of the program and its participants.

Nineteen individuals were officially recognized JJC members. The evaluation team interviewed all of them. Interviews were conducted in the offices of individual JJC members or in neutral locations such as coffee shops or restaurants. On average, the interviews lasted an hour. We followed an outline, but the interviews were relatively unstructured in that interviewees were encouraged to provide detail and depth to their initial answers. JJC members were asked general questions about their functions on the committee, how they perceived their own organization's role on the committee, how information was collected and stored, the committee's impact on the lives of the juveniles in the program, aspects of the program that worked well, and how the program might be improved. In addition, each interviewee was asked to describe the committee's goals. Attempts were made to contact and interview, for elucidation purposes, the individual who headed the CH (who was not an official member of the JJC) and was responsible for overseeing that program. However, repeated phone calls and messages went unanswered. Evaluators also made personal visits to the juvenile home, altering the day and time of visits with no success.

Detailed written notes were taken during interviews and committee meetings, and then were transcribed immediately after researchers returned to their offices. The resulting transcripts were then analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring themes expressed by participants, especially in terms of issues they perceived as affecting collaboration in the JJC or lack of collaboration. Each theme we identified was mentioned by at least a majority of the interviewees and was verified independently by each of the two evaluators. Below, we first report on developments during the evaluation process. We then describe the themes that emerged from our analysis of the transcripts of interviews and notes regarding committee functioning. For each recurrent theme, we present illustrative quotes from JJC members along with bridging commentary. Given the relatively small number of members, we do not identify them individually or the agencies they represent to preserve their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses to us.

Findings

Developments during the Evaluation

Because the state government provided the bulk of the funding for the program, the JJC was required to report quantitatively whether

the program was successful, a goal that the committee was allowed to define for itself. The goals the JJC set for itself were "to successfully supervise pre-adjudicated youth placed in community-based detention services" and "to reduce reliance on detention by utilizing alternative to detention supervision programs to successfully supervise youth in the community." Success was measured in terms of how many juveniles completed their programs without incurring new offenses, how many juveniles completed their sentences without "failing to appear" for scheduled court appearances, and whether the juveniles had a "positive or neutral leave reason." Finally, the goals were the same for both those who were under the guidance of the JJC through pre-adjudication and those who were serving formal sentences. The JJC used tracking to monitor the juveniles' behaviors and kept records on new offenses, failing to appear for court, and positive or neutral leave reasons. These numbers were then reported to the state.

The most current records for program completion at the time of the evaluation were for a six-month period two years before the evaluation. While other juveniles were in the program over this time period, the numbers to be presented next represent all juveniles in the cohort of people eligible to transition out of the program during that six-month period. Between July and December, 126 juveniles exited the program, 83 of whom were there with a pre-adjudicated status and 50 who were serving sentences. Within the pre-adjudicated group, 76 of 83 youth (91.5 percent) completed the program successfully. Among the 50 sentenced youth, 43 (86 percent) completed the program successfully, a number that was slightly less than the stated goal of 90 percent (JJC Tracking Documents, 2006). By that measure, the committee was highly successful with achievement rates in or near the 90th percentile. This success, however, did not translate to JJC members being satisfied with the committee's functioning.

Although the committee as a whole met monthly, its sub-committees met more frequently. These sub-committees were charged with a variety of tasks, including hands-on management of the juveniles as they entered and moved through the system, evaluating the various programs that comprised the juvenile justice system, and overseeing staff. Typically individuals from the subcommittees did not report to the larger group, but monthly updates were common when members of

these smaller committees were examining particular aspects of the program.

Approximately six months after the evaluation began, the committee chair's term ended and a new chair was appointed. Because he was appointed from the outside rather than from one of the collaborative agencies, the new chair struggled to understand the system and had difficulty establishing authority. The absence of an experienced chair provided the opportunity for strong personalities already on the committee to garner control over the committee. This powerful minority pushed through a major shift in the way juveniles were "tracked," a change that was immediately followed by a personnel change.

In addition to these obvious changes, quieter and more incipient ones began to surface. Long-time committee members who had initially appeared engaged in meetings began withdrawing. In some cases, these committee members still attended meetings, but they quit participating in committee discussions. Other committee members simply stopped attending meetings. During the evaluation, attendance at monthly meetings fluctuated. In general, between 15 and 18 individuals were present for the meetings, with a downward trend in overall attendance during the evaluation.

Early in the evaluation, committee members learned that the JJC was likely to face a budget cut in the next fiscal year, and issues raised regarding the programs for juveniles took on a new level of importance. Because of the budget cuts, the state indicated it would require the committee to provide a rationale for programs advanced for funding, especially if the connection between the program and the stated committee goals was not obvious. Due to the potential loss of funds, the JJC decided to assess the effectiveness of programs that were currently funded and to consider how those programs furthered the goals of the organization. This process led committee members to reassess the qualitative differences between the stated goals and a broader vision of the JJC's mission. The stated goals were easily quantifiable, and as seen above, either were achieved or were very close to being met. However, the stated goals were not viewed as representing outcomes due to the programs provided to the juveniles. Moreover, the stated goals were generally not the focus of committee meetings or answers to our questions during interviews with committee members. On the other hand, discussions regarding program outcomes were often stated in terms of goals that included long-term changes

in the juveniles' behaviors. These conversations led to questions of how well the JJC and the organizations represented in them "worked together" or collaborated to achieve the desired changes in juvenile behavior.

Recurring Themes

Our analysis of the responses of JJC members when asked about the nature of collaboration yielded seven major themes—disagreement in committee goals and programming choices; varying ideological orientations of agencies represented; difficulties in communication and resultant conflict; shifts in attendance, membership and participation; perceptions regarding unequal power sharing; inadequate data gathering and availability; and a lack of outcome measures. We describe each of these themes in greater detail below.

Programming Goals and Choices. When funding levels were relatively high, members generally agreed to provide a variety of educational and treatment programs in addition to monitoring individual behaviors. Faced with a decrease in funding, however, the question as to which programs to fund became important and pointed to a broader question that the committee had not broached: How did members identify the JJC's mission? Some committee members focused on a literal interpretation of the stated goals, and others adopted a broader definition that included creating lasting behavioral changes in the youth.

"If the focus is on compliance spend the money on strict supervision, surprise UA/BAs [urine analysis and blood alcohol tests], checks at schools, and night checks. If the focus is on the welfare of both the juveniles and the community, then things like [these two treatment programs] and diversion are essential."

"One thing we should be trying to do is to fund prevention."

"Programs should be family-centered and community-based. [Half of the committee] is focused on treatment whereas [the other half] is focused on containment."

Committee members who embraced the literal interpretation of the stated goals considered that both the focus and funding of internal programs could be streamlined to ensure that juveniles never had an opportunity to reoffend or fail to appear for court. Under this interpretation, tracking and probation would receive primary consideration for funding. This strict interpretation, however, would also mean

that programs designed to educate or modify behavior would be secondary, and perhaps eliminated, such as alcohol and other drug treatment programs, tutoring, therapy, and behavior modification programs. Adherents of the broader definition of JJC's mission believed that a strict interpretation of the goals would not change the juveniles' behaviors. A focus on treatment, however, would result in more program diversity, which would in turn result in a greater potential for long-term changes in a juvenile's behavior. This would require that limited funds be spread across more agencies and programs. Less funding to supervision might also result in the juveniles having less structure and more opportunities to reoffend or fail to appear for court.

Despite these concerns, members of the JJC did not advocate compliance through supervision alone. Most aligned themselves, at least rhetorically, with the broader interpretation of the purpose of the program. That said, however, when disagreements manifested regarding how to prioritize programs when funds were limited, those disagreements seemed to push the committee towards a focus on the stricter interpretation of the goals. Thus, while committee members agreed that the purpose of this program was to make changes that would provide the greatest opportunity to move the juveniles out of the system, they also believed that increasing supervision would help prevent the juveniles from reoffending during their time in the program and this would allow them to meet the stated goals of the program. Moreover, when funding became tight, committee members aligned themselves along the orientations of their agencies, with members from the criminal justice perspective arguing for more money for monitoring and members from the mental health perspective arguing to fund more treatment.

"The role of this committee is to spend resources on effective outcomes."

"The radar of the committee needs to go out a little farther."

"There is a difference between containment and treatment."

Some committee members articulated concerns about cuts in funding that would result in fewer options for juvenile placements when they entered the program. They suggested that under tight funding, the placement process became less about meeting the needs of the individual and fulfilling the goals of the

program, and more about placing juveniles into treatment categories based on room availability.

"The focus is management driven, bed caps, for example."

"We need to know whether a kid would be detention-bound if there was room."

Varying Agency Orientations. A multi-agency committee meant that differing opinions regarding the best way to aid the target population would be present. In this situation, individuals schooled in criminal justice perspectives often viewed the problems of juvenile justice differently from their counterparts with social or behavioral science perspectives. Interestingly, most members of the JJC, irrespective of their training, felt that their approaches to problems were neither understood nor appreciated by members of the committee who did not share their disciplinary backgrounds. Interviewees pointed to a lack of understanding about what happened in the different facets of the system, with members identifying screening, therapy, and the court, among other areas, as examples in which individual contributions were undervalued by others on the committee.

"No one knows what goes on in [name of respondent's agency]. No one has ever come to see my relationship with the kids. I wish everyone would come [and] see what really happens there."

Examples of these ideological divisions were often repeated as committee members from within the social or behavioral science perspective talked about the human propensity for making mistakes as a function of creating positive and lasting behavioral changes, while those from the criminal justice perspective were more inclined to see infractions in the rules as negative behavior that had to be punished.

These varying philosophies led some committee members to advocate more formalized procedures for dealing with juveniles.

"The problems I see are attendance, communication, and formalizing procedures."

"We should have MOUs [memoranda of understanding] between the sides regarding sanctions."

That committee members failed to embrace the perspective of the "other" is not surprising. The lack of a structure that allowed constructive solutions to those differences, however, was a continuing source of

contention. Further, the fact that there was no consensus or shared understandings regarding forgiveness or sanctions for client behavior that was deemed problematic, further split the committee and consumed time during committee meetings.

Communication and Conflict. This evaluation identified communication problems between members of the committee that stemmed from the different philosophical approaches to juvenile justice. One JJC member with a criminal justice background pointed to his/her area within the justice system by way of example, stating that most committee members had no understanding of the dynamics that took place when the juveniles were within her/his purview. That example pointed to a general problem—a lack of understanding about the various components that comprised the system limited the committee's ability to bring about positive changes in the youth. Other committee members echoed the idea that committee members had a general lack of understanding regarding other members' specific roles within the system. This lack of understanding was reflected in how decisions were made throughout the process. As just one indicator of the problem, members cited the numbers of overrides of committee decisions. (Most overrides occurred at one individual's discretion.) Some committee members felt that their contributions to the juveniles and to the program were not valued. As these feelings intensified over the period of the evaluation, members reacted by withholding comments during committee meetings. As one interviewee explained, people did what they deemed appropriate, even if it went against the JJC's direction.

"It doesn't really matter what the committee says. People pretty much do what they've done."

"We should formalize outcome reporting and have formalized roles on the committee."

Collaboration requires participation and candid communication. If lines of communication are not established and respected, the collaborative model breaks down and attendance suffers.

Attendance, Membership and Participation. One important consequence of the breakdown of communication was manifest in both the tenor of, and the attendance at, monthly meetings. Early in the evaluation a forum appeared that allowed individuals to respectfully disagree, but lines of communication

disintegrated during the evaluation. This disintegration resulted partly because of a change in key personnel in the committee, and partly because new members had little or no apparent training. Changes in committee membership exacerbated previous tensions and absenteeism increased. These absences increased the levels of tension and lack of communication among committee members.

"The range of people on the committee is good, but the committee only works if you have high attendance."

A primary benefit of the collaborative juvenile justice model is the potential to bring together people with diverse backgrounds and training who can use their experiences to benefit the youth being supervised. Regardless of the composition of the group, however, collaboration cannot exist if committee members are not encouraged to attend and participate.

Power Sharing. An important change in power also resulted from lower attendance and the failure of communication. This change resulted in consolidation of power, mostly resting in the hands of a single person. Committee members perceived the change in power but felt they could not challenge it. Decisions seemed to be made without consulting the membership and without explanation. For example, during interviews, JJC members described what had happened when the powerful committee member dismantled one subcommittee and replaced it with a fundamentally different group.

"The old subcommittee was more custom-built for the kids. The new one is designed to fit the kid into [the treatment program already in place]."

Interestingly, however, the powerful member saw the change as a way to benefit communication among members of the committee representing varying agency orientations and competing philosophies,

"Do you know why I created [the new subcommittee]? I created it so that they would have to talk to each other."

Regardless of the reason for the change, the lack of communication and consensus regarding the creation of the new committee led many members to interpret the new subcommittee as a "power play," rather than as a change designed to benefit committee functionality, or the juveniles, their families, and the community.

As the evaluation period ended, several committee members were becoming more

outspoken regarding changes that the powerful individual was implementing. As a result of additional changes to subcommittees, followed by changes in the tracking component of the program, some committee members began pushing the leader for a rationale to justify the changes and challenging the lack of committee involvement in those changes. The result was that the "powerful" leader began to miss the monthly meetings, leading to lessened feelings of relevance for the other committee members.

Data Gathering and Availability. When the JJC was first created, state funding allowed the committee to provide a wide variety of programs. For example, 23 different individuals or agencies provided services for the juveniles in 2002. By 2005, that number had dropped to five individuals or agencies. We attempted to collect data for the 2005 programs to assess their efficacy. Some information was comprehensive, for example, data on juveniles in a multi-systemic therapy (MST) program. Some records, however, were poorly maintained and provided little information on either the number of juveniles in the programs or the effectiveness of the particular programs, for example, an alcohol or other drug class, or outreach programs such as tutoring offered by one of the five agencies receiving funding during 2005–2006.

This evaluation also considered all the data that were gathered by various JJC-related agencies and how that information was shared among members of the committee. Information regarding juvenile offenders was obtained through a variety of channels, often including records kept by some combination of the police, schools, social workers, mental health providers, and the courts. The evaluation found that the JJC was not gathering or sharing information effectively, a finding that highlighted both a symptom and a cause of the communication problems discussed previously.

Individual agencies wished to gather information separately to (1) verify earlier statements by the juveniles and (2) ask specialized questions. However, some of the information collected by the various entities in the juvenile justice system was redundant.

"We don't have good measures as a whole. Individual agencies do have some of that information, but it doesn't get out to everyone."

"We spend a lot of time getting duplicate information that other people have already collected on these kids."

A centralized database for sharing basic information would save time and expense, would minimize potential data errors, and would facilitate new lines of communication among committee members. Data collection would also allow the committee to identify particularly troublesome areas or events to identify proper treatment and supervision regimens.

Measuring Outcomes. A more important problem regarding information collection was also identified. The JJC is charged with providing services to juvenile offenders so as to correct behaviors while allowing the juvenile to remain in the community. Critical information, however, especially recidivism rates and measures of the effectiveness of the different programs that comprised the juvenile justice program, was not collected. Anecdotes regarding repeat offending were shared in subcommittees but recidivism was not a routine topic of discussion in the broader group. Further, we found that the committee was not using its arguably best source of information regarding their program: exit interviews with youth who completed the program. The JJC had no mechanism in place to speak with juveniles at the completion of their programs, or at any point thereafter. In addition to the important information the juveniles might be able to provide, the lack of data on recidivism prevented the committee from identifying any problems that might exist in the structure.

“We don’t know who comes back.”

Obviously, the collection of systematic data on recidivism would help the committee identify appropriate programs for juveniles. Exit interviews in conjunction with data on recidivism would also help identify specific programs that had been effective, along with identifying programs that were not effective and might be cut.

Funding and space limitations dictated which juveniles this program helps. Given those limitations, identification of the most effective programs is essential. Programs that are effective in the literature, and even those that were effective in this situation, will likely exhibit variations that result from staff and management practices at the local level. Therefore, interviewees thought that the committee should also monitor how those programs are working.

“We need to set identifiable and measurable outcomes.”

Questions surrounding the issue of resource consolidation emerged after considering the programs that were being funded,

comparing the change in the number of providers over time, and the efficacy of the programs. Due to the data gaps identified through the evaluation, committee members began to reassess how providers were contracted and what reports should be required of the providers. Additionally, some committee members believed that at least one provider was chosen because of a personal friendship with a committee member. Thus, the felt need for formalizing reporting requirements at regular intervals led to a discussion regarding whether services should be contracted for on a “fee for service” basis or paid as a yearly contract. Members began discussing ways to counter preferential treatment for providers by considering moving contracting for services into a “request for proposals” (RFP) model. This caused concern from other members who suggested that using an RFP would further consolidate services with a few providers. Others, however, saw the RFP process as a way to encourage new and different programs and providers. One benefit of this discussion was that committee members sought ways to increase accountability of program providers. Another benefit was an increase in productive conversations during committee meetings, although it is also notable that these discussions took place primarily in the absence of the most powerful committee member.

Discussion

First, we explore the implications of our overall evaluation in terms of the three questions, derived from the literature on juvenile justice collaboration, that we began with. That literature implies that a relationship exists between collaboration and success in achieving the program goals. When considered minimally, the current program belies that assumption. The program, as we saw, met its most basic (albeit, self-defined) goals for success. However, given the lack of adequate data that monitors recidivism and the accountability of program providers, this evaluation cannot answer whether the broader vision of what the JJC *ought to do* was achieved. Thus, it is possible for agencies to work together without “collaborating” in the fullest sense of the word, and to achieve a minimal level of success. The best-case scenario, of course, would be for multi-agency committees to truly collaborate, resulting in broader program success. Clearly, that is not happening in the case of the JJC. However, the committee’s current situation avoids two other possibilities: the less desirable alternative wherein the

committee collaborates well but does not meet any success; and the least desirable one where they do not collaborate and also fail to find any success. We arrive, therefore, at the conclusion that the relationship between collaboration and outcome success is not automatic but problematic. However, given the limited nature of this study (one multi-agency committee in one jurisdiction) it is important that future research examine this question more extensively.

Next, in answer to the questions from the literature about the perceptions of participants regarding their experiences in multi-agency collaboration and their thoughts regarding the strengths and drawbacks of such an approach to juvenile justice, we should summarize the problems we identified above. Disagreements about the committee’s goals reflected the differences in the orientations of the various agencies individual members represented. These disagreements include the lack of a shared vision regarding the goals of the program, leading to diminished attendance and participation, the unequal power-based role performances of members of the committee, shortcomings with effective communication and information sharing, trouble with collecting needed data about the juveniles, hurdles in ascertaining the effectiveness of the programs the juveniles were sent to, and making this information widely available. It is evident that JJC members perceived that major problems existed with the attempted collaboration and disappointments outweighed the minor satisfaction resulting from having achieved the minimal outcome success level that the committee had set. This can be further illustrated by considering the issue of juveniles with co-occurring problem behaviors.

Borum (2003) notes that most youth in the juvenile justice system have both mental health and substance abuse problems (see also Cropsey, Weaver, & Dupre, 2008; Golzari, Hunt, & Anoshiravani, 2006; Grizzo, 1999; Potter & Jensen, 2003; Stewart & Trupin, 2003). Glisson and Green (2006) find that these behavioral health issues are often undiagnosed, and when juvenile offenders were properly diagnosed and treated, the odds of an out-of-home placement dropped 36 percent when controlling for factors including race, gender, location, and income, among others (p. 487). The pervasiveness of behavioral health problems among juveniles in the system highlights the importance of targeting mental health issues of the juveniles who enter the system, and again, is consistent with the

practices in place in this county-level juvenile justice program. Moreover, the fact that these youth have co-occurring problems also demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive model for dealing with delinquent juveniles and supports the broad interpretation of the goals for this juvenile justice program.

Given the wide range of expertise on the JJC, the issue of co-occurring behavioral problems was ripe for discussion and resolution. Unfortunately, the discussion never happened and the topic was mentioned perfunctorily. Why? Collaborative committees require open, informed communication, in which all the participants feel comfortable discussing potentially controversial ideas and perspectives. Thus, it is important for committee members to feel that their opinions are valued and respected. Part of communication also requires participants to have an overall understanding of the roles and perspectives of the other committee members. This evaluation indicated a lack of understanding between the individual components that led to an overall deficiency in considering the system as a whole. The need for cross-training (Marks, Sabella, Burke & Zaccaro, 2001) of individuals working in the different areas that comprise juvenile justice may be a possible solution to the problems experienced by the JJC.

Worrall (2004) suggests that small, select groups might be more effective in collaboration than larger groups. Given the JJC's experience, the argument may have merit. A smaller committee might have been better suited to addressing some of the problems that arose in the JJC, especially the consolidation of power. Perhaps a committee of 19 was so large that it had become unwieldy. The caution here is that a smaller group is likely to lose the diversity of opinion and perspectives that represents the strength of the collaborative approach to dealing with juvenile justice. The answer to the disadvantages of a larger committee may therefore lie in identifying and clearly articulating common goals, establishing ground rules for decisions, respecting diverse opinions, and providing an open forum of communication.

A large committee creates problems, but on balance the broader level of representation in such a committee outweighs the challenges presented. Despite the difficulties with collaborating noted above, the JJC did achieve its minimally-desired outcomes. The key to maximizing effectiveness for a committee of any size, however, is for committee members to have mutual respect (Henneman, Lee &

Cohen, 1995) and subscribe to a common vision regarding the mission of the group, to formalize the structure of the committee and to give individuals defined roles and shared power (Kraus, 1980).

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