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## The Connection

Community-based Services, Advocacy  
and Research for Connecticut

To The Members of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee  
July 20<sup>th</sup> 2107: Comments, The Connection, Inc.

**The Workgroup process: Is it working effectively? Is the workload balanced? Are there suggestions for improvement?**

- We have not participated in this process as of yet. However, we encourage participation from providers and community stakeholders at a “grass roots” level to help inform and guide the process.

**The current goals: Our efforts to reduce recidivism, incarceration and increase diversion have been quite successful. Should these goals be revisited, revised, and are new measures for juvenile justice system improvement called for?**

- If a young adult could avoid entering the juvenile justice system, this would be more optimal. Throughout the 1990s, states and school districts relied on zero-tolerance discipline policies that severely increased children and youth contact with the court system, particularly by treating school discipline issues as criminal ones. These types of policies, which combine to form a “school-to-prison pipeline,” failed to produce positive outcomes for young people and are developmentally inappropriate and overly punitive.
- The workgroup should look at partnerships with schools where children and youth can receive an education within a therapeutic environment. The program would be school-based, include an after-school component and be therapeutic. In this way, educational and therapeutic goals can be met while the client develops skills to achieve in an educational environment while gaining emotional stability. A model that has worked for over two decades; Teaching Our Positive Side (T.O.P.S) at the Institute of Living; is a good example of how a partnership between the Hartford Board of Education and a provider, the Institute of Living, have worked together over two decades - to help struggling clients grow and improve with the supports they need. The outcomes have been measurable and notable.
- Behavioral health outcomes should be addressed concurrently with problem behaviors since they are most likely linked to trauma.



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**The new reform ideas for the JIPOC: In the course of our work together over the past nearly three years, are there gaps that need to be addressed, problems that may be overlooked or areas in need of further research and evaluation?**

- We are certain that **gaps** exist within many systems that influence children, youth and emerging adult's life in crisis. There is a lack of coordination and communication which results in a "label" versus a solution. The goal is to address the clinical, social and educational issues as soon as possible with interventions that are proven, research-based and that will result in better outcomes for children and youth.
- One of the significant **problems** within our system today is not having a full understanding of the client population's behavioral health needs, which is critical to his/her success moving forward. Equally important, is the clear, transparent communication amongst all stakeholders, including family, DCF personnel, schools, courts and any/all natural supports or mentors who know this client and can shed light on who they are and what they need. It is critical that the trauma history of clients and those interventions that have been tried are obtained prior to any admission within a future program.
- Helping youth stabilize is an area that is often **overlooked**. This requires assessment, treatment and developmental programming that are trauma-informed, delivered by well-trained, supervised, and supported staff. It will require a team approach where internal and external stakeholders in the client's life come together with him/her to plan for and facilitate the acquisition of prosocial skill development, therapeutic supports, academic and/or vocational instruction, work readiness, and work experience. The success of this program will hinge on the relationships developed between the system (DCF and JBCSSD) and multiple stakeholders.

Respectfully Submitted,

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