

## **PARENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM/PRACTICE PLAN**

The purpose of this document is to briefly provide practical steps for developing a parent engagement program at the state level.

### **1. Define common terms for family engagement and involvement.**

Since the meaning of family, family engagement, and related concepts vary considerably, it is important to define a common vocabulary. As a starting point, here are a couple of key terms:

- “Family” is anyone that provides care or structure to youth and/or anyone the youth considers to be family.
- “Family engagement” is “empowering families, based on their strengths, to have an active role in their child’s disposition and treatment.

### **2. Develop a basic guide for families that can be tailored and expanded for use by each local jurisdiction.**

The purpose of the guide is to help families understand the juvenile justice system and to prepare them to work closely with juvenile justice staff in order to promote positive outcomes for their children. It should emphasize that it is only a guide and that each child’s experience is unique based on many factors including: needs of the juvenile, nature of the offense (e.g., whether injury or damage was done), prior arrests or adjudications, and potential risk to other people or property.

The guide should include the following, as a minimum:

- definitions and descriptions of all juvenile justice programs and processes, so the family will know what is going to happen to their child as they go through the system from the time of arrest to case termination;
- a list and description of people the family and youth will meet in the juvenile justice system and ways in which the family, juvenile probation, and juvenile court can work together to help the youth be successful;
- a bill of rights and responsibilities for everyone involved, including the family, the juvenile, probation, and the court;

- a flow chart showing the steps from arrest to case closure; and
- general ways that the family can be an advocate for their child, for example: (1) attending court and meetings with the youth, (2) keeping a file with all documents related to their child's case and notes on who they speak with, scheduled hearings, and other dates, and (3) maintaining a working phone number and promptly returning phone calls to juvenile justice professionals.

The guide should be available in multiple languages, in print, and online. It might also be beneficial to have short videos for families with limited reading ability.

It is recommended that a focus group be created to develop the guide. The group should include juvenile judges, DA/CA, Court Services, KDOC, Juvenile Community Corrections, Juvenile defense, mental health, DCF and family advocates.

### **3. Create a training curriculum for all juvenile justice system professionals regarding how to interact with families.**

The state-sponsored training should accomplish the following, as a minimum:

- identify and promote family engagement practices and processes, which support communication between the families and the juvenile justice system.
- promote behaviors that lead to effective interaction with families with diverse backgrounds and needs (e.g. developing listening skills, reducing personal biases and stereotypes, motivational interviewing)
- promote a culture that respects the family's role as caretaker and the knowledge and relationship that is central to that role. Respect starts with the way we communicate with each other. For families to convey respect and collaborate effectively they must believe they are respected and valued.

**4. Review and improve current policy, procedures, and standards to identify where opportunity for family engagement can be strengthened.**

This review process should be carried by an objective team and should include input from families and family advocates.

A potential area for consideration might be improving family involvement in out-of-home placements, including the juvenile justice correction facility. This might involve making adjustments to policies that limit family engagement, including who can visit a youth, when they can visit, ways of communication with the youth, inclusion in family therapy and meetings (scheduled around family's availability), etc. It might also involve improves to prepare families for reunification by helping them access services and have them in place upon the youth's return and aid in exchanging information between facility and schools.

**5. Develop standards on family engagement for use by juvenile correctional facilities and all state funded programs.**

The standards should promote the following:

- A practice and policy to ensure that families have the information they need to participate effectively in their child's planning and rehabilitation.
- A process for all families with youth involved in the Juvenile Justice system to provide input regarding their experiences—which is then reviewed and used for process improvement
- A process to evaluate the capacity of the system to support family involvement.

**6. Provide evidence-based parent education program training for use in local jurisdictions.**

Every district should have access to a parent education program that is designed to work with juvenile offenders and/or juveniles with behavior problems. If the facilitator is contracted from outside the agency, they should complete the family engagement training prior to facilitating a class.

**7. Every community supervision agency should have a dedicated staff person to coordinate family engagement efforts and activities**

There needs to be a juvenile justice professional dedicated to help families access resources to meet their basic needs, strengthen partnerships in the community, and reduce barriers that prevent the youth from being successful.

While planning and initiating a family engagement program for Kansas, dedicated staffing at the state level will be needed. Once policy and standards are in place and local agencies are trained, state level involvement will likely be minimal

**8. Continue research-based best practice models that integrate cross-disciplinary and intensive family focused approaches in addressing violence prevention among youth with involvement in the juvenile justice system**

Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is already available statewide.

**9. Establish a Juvenile Justice Family Peer Advocate Project**

Each jurisdiction should identify existing family support organizations and initiatives that can be utilized or expanded to provide support to families involved in the juvenile justice system. Some judicial districts may need assistance with this.

**10. Develop performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of family engagement after implementing the standards, training, policy, etc.**

Performance measures should be developed to evaluate the overall effectiveness of implementing the above recommendations and to make process improvements as needed.

**11. Develop fiscal strategies to fund family engagement.**

Obviously, implementing the above recommendations will require state funding. The overall cost will vary depending on jurisdiction. A cost analysis should be performed and then strategies for addressing the costs. For example, reinvestment funds may be utilized by way of an annual allocation.