



OJJDP FY 2022 Regional Listening Session: Southern Region

August 15, 2022 | 11 a.m.–1 p.m. ET

Breakout Room #1: Treating Children as Children

1. What does it mean to you to treat children as children?

- It is important to bring science into every aspect of the system. Specifically, within law enforcement, the judiciary system, and the juvenile justice system. This encompasses the science of how young people behave and really focusing on incorporating this information into these systems. We can't assume that young people are small adults, and that they exhibit the same behaviors as adults. They really need to be honored and respected, and we must ensure that we give them every opportunity to be successful.
- Many of the kids that we work with have experienced trauma in their lives. So, it's important for people to be trauma-informed and trauma-responsive when we work with young people.
- Creating a healthy community and a healthy home is key in rehabilitating and getting young people to a point where they are productive.
- Redemption. We try to teach kids that they are not their biggest mistake. Having mentors in place who are there for them and aren't there to judge them is critical. Giving kids the chance to learn from their mistakes and to move forward is so important.

a. What do you think are best practices for treating children as children?

- We have workforce development and mentoring programs. Having a positive role model is an important best practice. Mentoring is a wonderful medium when it comes to working with kids because it allows kids to be a kid. It ensures that we don't ask them to grow up too early.
- Kids should be allowed to make mistakes and enjoy their childhood, as opposed to always being punished by it.
- Engage the family from the start. Do monthly parental or caregiver contacts so that you are seeing them either in person or virtually. Keep them informed of the progress that their children are doing. Also emphasize everything that the child is doing right because it's important to be a positive role model in this context. Do case management with the families, so they are also successful on their end, in addition to group counseling for families.

2. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to treat children as children?

- The opioid epidemic is really affecting [location]. A lot of this is happening where kids are located, so a lot of it is around schools. [Location] is looking at ways to expand mental health treatment but unfortunately, there is such a shortage of these resources right now.
- The challenges are at the level of programs, practices, and policies. There are challenges in all three. There is a lack of community-based prevention services, particularly mental health services.
- [State] is having challenges with funding resources and finding resources that keep youth from reoffending. It doesn't have many diversion programs in place currently.



3. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) establishes four core requirements: (1) the deinstitutionalization of status offenders; (2) separation of youth from adults in secure facilities; (3) removal of youth from adult jails and lockups; and (4) reducing racial and ethnic disparities.

- a. What goals do you recommend OJJDP set for the jail removal requirement (which states must follow if they want to participate in the Title II Formula Grants Program)? (For example, zero youth in adult jails.)**
- From a policy perspective, there are some policies that can be enacted at the state level that keeps status offenders out of confinement. For example, simple citation in lieu of arrest is one suggestion. This would obviously mean partnering with law enforcement to ensure this happens because it's important that these partner agencies are at the table. We want to have a good understanding of not only what we do but what they do. It's important to know how we can support each other.
 - [State] has been trying to chip away at young people being put in adult prisons, but this isn't fully implemented.
- b. Can we undertake any work with partners like the National Sheriffs' Association, the American Jail Association, or others to help reach the specified goals?**
- National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is one organization to partner with.
- c. What challenges, if any, do you anticipate facing as a result of the pandemic when enforcing the jail removal requirement to remove juveniles from adult jails and lockups?**
- We have seen a spike in gun violence in our community. A lot of prosecutors are being more punitive instead of being restorative. We need to reinvest in more restorative alternatives for our youth where kids aren't being incarcerated but instead are put in these restorative programs that emphasize mental health and mentoring.

4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for treating children as children should be?

- Every state would implement civil citation, especially for misdemeanor offenses, instead of incarceration. And there would be access to community-based resources that are culturally responsive. At the level of diversion, there would be easier access to diversion programs for communities, as well. When you think of the cost of incarceration versus the cost of these programs, it really is just looking at the reallocation of resources. This is totally doable.
- We want to see an unlimited number of resources and introduce innovative programs to youth that they may not have had access to before. Innovative and new programs—like teaching robotics, for example—that youth are not used to would be beneficial.
- It is important for communities to see young people as a resource and not as people they should be afraid of. It would be great to see an emphasis on seeing kids being certified so they can join the workforce when they become of age. So, access to education that is maybe not only in terms of a traditional 4-year college route would be great.
- Looking at the whole family dynamic is important. How do we begin to look at the entire family and have a robust enough referral network to address all the needs that a family may have, so



that we aren't just putting the burden on the youth? We need to address counseling the family may need, childcare needs that need to be met. Because all of these things trickle down to the child.

5. What can OJJDP do to advance this key priority through the kinds of strategies and activities it undertakes? (For example, communications, webinars and training, publications, policy guidelines, and pilot programs.)

- The biggest impact would be policy change. And incentivizing states to implement policy that is more children focused and children friendly.
- Webinars and town halls are great, but it is important to have the correct audience attending. We need to focus on key state leaders and understand what they care about. So, focus on the executive and legislative branches when it comes to initiating policy changes. The judicial system has a lot of convening power and taking advantage of that is critical.

6. How can OJJDP support better cross-system collaboration to lead to improved treatment of children as children?

- Alignment with all the systems that kids interact with and facilitating trainings or requiring these partnerships. And making sure that kids are at the decision-making table when important decisions are being made—whether that's at the level of the SAGs [(State Advisory Groups)] or at the community level. For example, have a girls coordinating council that brings in all entities that youth interact with, and determine the priorities that need to be addressed. Then recommend any changes on a policy basis. That can be very effective at having a young person's voice incorporated.
- Another piece that is a challenge is data sharing at the state level, especially as it relates to child welfare. Some sort of state incentive to have all key agencies working together as one cohesive unit is important. There seems to be a lot of entities that try to solve problems on their own and a lot of that information is siloed.

7. What kinds of strategies or activities is your state or region currently doing well?

- One thing that [state] is doing well in the past decade has been focused on how to keep kids out of the deep end and reinvest resources in early intervention and prevention. A number of key legislations were passed where you cannot incarcerate a young person for misdemeanors. There has been a significant decrease in the arrest rate in the past 10 years as a result of these policy changes.
- In terms of how our region is being more culturally responsive to young people, [organization] has really thought about innovative approaches to engage with youth, really understanding their specific needs. It really does depend though on where you are. There are some places in the same state that focus on punitive measures and so it can be challenging as certain regions in the same state do things very differently. There really is such a thing as justice by geography because of this.



Breakout Room #2: Serving Young People at Home, in Their Communities, With Their Families

1. What does it mean to you to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

- a. **What do you think are best practices for serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families?**
 - When I think about that, I don't think about just in the home; I think about in the community more so than in the home. So, just making sure that proper assessments have been done and providing proper resources based on what the assessments reveal.
 - In [state], what has been helpful is an evening reporting center for youth. A lot of the counties in [state] are rural. Instead of detention, the youth go to a reporting center where they may get classes and it keeps them in the home and works well because a lot of these youth are committing those acts whether at school or right after school when no one is at home, so having a reporting center helps. An evening reporting center doesn't require a ton of resources.
 - About 5 or 10 years ago, they were really pushing wraparound services and family-based services. That was potentially going to be in home. But one of the issues we're running into is that the state would rather contract with private providers, and we just don't have enough private providers to do that.
 - For our juvenile population, we use youth reporting centers that youth are required to report to on a daily basis. Kids are basically doing school at these centers rather than going to their school. In other cases, they show up in the afternoon and might talk with a social worker or an officer and participate in some sort of restorative or rehabilitative program or therapy. It's sort of a way to check in on people and give them a place to be and something to do.
 - The bigger problem [in location] is the housing crisis is tremendous and we're trying to provide services to keep the kids in homes and get them out of cars and off couches. Family stabilization services, where they try to help families with rent and utilities and take pressures off the home, need to be prioritized. That helps families be supportive of their children. Having these services is a true wraparound kind of support.
- b. **Is serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families something that states seem willing to do?**
 - In [state], I think we're open to that and not only open but working toward making sure that we have a family approach. It's a system of care that's making sure youth and families have community-based services. This affords the youth and family to really get them what they need. The folks who are doing the system of care work realized that if the youth are going to get what they need, then the whole family unit needs to get what they need. And that may not be mom and dad; it might be grandma and/or whoever else.
- c. **Do states feel like it's a good idea to have these alternatives to detention?**
 - I see a lot of conflict between sort of mid-level policy makers, like people who are in the Health and Human Services Administration, who talk about trying to keep families unified and provide these community-based and family-based services, and practitioners who are in the home



sometimes with families who I think are a little more skeptical about the family situation. A lot of times, the multidisciplinary team process that is mandated by state code is loosely followed, and parents aren't given much voice. The family becomes secondary to the process.

- We want to keep kids in the community, but if they don't have the resources to do it, you're just setting everyone up for failure, and it's going to lead to long-term skepticism of that model. So, a lot of our work has been stepping back from trying to change the policies into getting the right resources and getting the right funding.
- We stress civil citations. But with kids whose parents are incarcerated, they tend to fall through the cracks because whoever is taking care of them is not equipped and not invested to do all the family requirements that are linked to these types of services. They are struggling to make it with the basics. And then the kid's record looks worse because they've fallen through the cracks and there's no support system to help them meet the requirements that they need. Sometimes we can't navigate the bureaucracy.

d. What resources are needed to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

- The caregivers are ill equipped. They don't know what to do and don't have the parenting skills to respond. Then they end up getting marked as noncompliant. So, just teaching the parenting skills to be able to set boundaries and move forward.
- Mental health resources, which in the last 2–3 years with the pandemic, the mental health of our youth is suffering. And just having those people with the training to work with youth is a challenge. Sometimes we know what they need, but we don't have a provider to get it to them right away. They are on a waiting list. We need alcohol and substance use programs for youth. I can't speak from data on that point, but I see that anecdotally.
- If they are in the community, substance use is a risk we have to account for.
- The mental health aspect can't be stressed enough. That is a big challenge. And the training that we've been receiving is so academic and disconnected from when you get to the real situation. There is a really big gulf between the training and the reality situations. So, I would say the ability to get that training and to train up providers and to have the funds to get that best-in-class training would be helpful. And the stabilization issue is a big issue for these families. You can't get them help if they don't have a place to sleep and food to eat. They're struggling with Maslow's [hierarchy of needs].

e. How do we envision using providers to get to the goal of alternatives to incarceration for our youth?

- As a provider, we can go to court with them and help them through challenges like transportation issues. Help guide the caretakers in some of these behavioral types of activities.
- With the families, we can connect with them because we are part of the community. We can be that ear for the families.

2. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

a. What are some barriers to providing in-home and community-based programming to youth?



- There is a gap between the models of intervention the state is investing in and what the providers are actually trained in and proficient in doing. Another barrier is the number of providers. There is one intensive behavioral program that parents line up for because there just are not enough providers of behavioral and mental health services. And providers are serving a dual role of working with families, but they are also in a sort of adversarial role because they have to report on youth participation and they have mandatory reporting requirements, which are important, but sometimes there are issues with neglect that's really just poverty where families are getting reported on that's causing problems. So, there is a level of distrust between the families and the providers coming out of this judicial system.
- For a child who is referenced with behavioral issues, for example, the child may be living in a car with their parents. DCF says that's not abuse and neglect. But it's a very crisis-oriented situation. The car is not mobile. The kid is failing miserably at his compliance issues. And the father is a mess. We need simple solutions to this very complex problem to help these children and families and stabilize them.
- The poverty level is so high that most people are going to be on Medicare or Medicaid, and I think that there are enough providers out there that realize that if they can operate in a market where there's more private pay, they're going to, to make more money.
- There's a lot of competition with trying to hire individuals to do the work that has gotten hard. Salaries are going up fast. To get people to do this is getting difficult.
- If a family needs diapers that day, you need to be able to go buy diapers, but this billing thing is really a challenge. All of the things are pretty simple. Maybe the kid just wants shoes, and the shoes calm him down. Community providers can work their way through and solve some of these problems. But providers don't know if they will get reimbursed. People can get paid more by doing YouTube videos today than by being a provider. Flexibility is definitely a big issue. There is money left on the table because the whole process of moving it around is so complicated.

3. Do you find the TTA opportunities OJJDP provides to be helpful?

- I think there's a disconnect in terms of, "Who is the client?" Is it the people who are providing the services or is it OJJDP? That gets confused in some of the TTA provision.

4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families should be?

- Resources designed to help change perspectives.
- There is a disconnect where one group sees the benefit to alternatives to detention, but maybe your General Assembly doesn't, or the juvenile court doesn't see the benefit of it.
- Sometimes there's a disconnect between the statute and implementation. So, working on those mindsets and having some help there would be my magic wand.
- Start by making sure states have enough service providers to cover a lot of different modalities or different models of intervention. And make sure those people are divorced from any of the court supervision or sort of enforcement model. They are there to be advocates for the family and help the family. They can report if there's danger to the child, but they are there to help the family first.



- I would like more training. Like from neurologist Dr. Bruce Perry, who wrote *The Boy Who Was Raised by a Dog*. It's very motivational, helpful, and insightful in terms of how the simple kinds of things can work. Like, you can use Velcro to help calm kids down. That type of training that is straightforward but simple—I would really like that.
- More flexibility in terms of the programming so that we can work to stabilize the family. Getting the family stable is a very complicated thing, but it's doable, but it takes time. Also, ban "noncompliant." Families have a fear of succeeding. We need to help them succeed more.
- Use de-identified data from the school system to identify those risk factors to decide on what kinds of programs are needed. Track them and pick them up earlier to get them the services they need. We need more data analysis. It's not profiling, but it is recognizing that we have populations that we need to be helping more and earlier rather than later. Where are these risk factors and getting services to them? Schools that don't do well get punished. Instead, we need to help these schools help these kids.
- Make sure families have access to resources at no cost. Make sure with that first referral there's a payment mechanism for that. Use any of these other social services that see risk factors and see red flags.
- Use youth assessment centers. These do all the things we are talking about. After that first contact with law enforcement for specific acts (not felonies), they send them to a center that provides those services and that does not go to court. And our law enforcement can create a diversion program.
- Set up a recognition program for law enforcement that help divert these kids. We need to recognize them for really working with kids. Reward them to change their practices. There are great officers out there doing great things and they need to be moved to the top.

5. What can OJJDP do to advance this key priority through the kinds of strategies and activities it undertakes? (For example, communications, webinars and training, publications, policy guidelines, and pilot programs.)

- The data analysis stuff, to get it right. OJJDP could really contribute to get it to scale. To get a handle on how to get that done between social services, schools, and the justice system.
- Implementation guidelines and advice and reporting it back to the field.
- I love pilots with innovation from the field, so I think these listening sessions are heartening. If you put it out there and got the field to have innovations with the goals presented and the ability to be flexible to implement those, that would be great.
- Regarding the youth assessment centers and reporting centers, I'm skeptical of them as long-term solutions. They require scheduling and transportation. I would look at more home-based models instead for pilots.

Breakout Room #3: Opening Up Opportunities for System-Involved Youth

1. What does it mean to you to open up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Opening up opportunities means youth are able to receive placement, training, and equal education. Justice-involved youth should be included, and diversity should be recognized.



Equitable practices should be put in place to ensure youth are able to receive a fair and equitable chance to do well and they're given the tools they need to succeed.

- I'm a huge believer of children being a product of their environment. A lot of times these juvenile justice issues happen because this is all they know. Mentorship is a key element for teaching children a different way of life. Mentors can be very impactful, such as by providing support with interviewing and answering interview questions, as well as employment opportunities. Sometimes these youth are discounted because they have history in the juvenile justice system. It is important to continue to lobby for children's efforts and keep that in the forefront of our minds when supporting these youth and providing them with an opportunity to change their trajectory is critical.

a. What do you think are best practices for opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- We have an organization that provides support and resources for youth that live in impacted communities. The initiative takes into consideration diverse backgrounds and makes an effort to be inclusive and equitable. The initiative also takes into consideration the local organizations that are doing the work for youth in impacted communities.
- Kids should have access to interventions before they enter the system. For example, Big Brothers Big Sisters allows youth to have a mentor who teaches new skills and shows them a different way of life. Another example in [state] is programming for work with at-risk youth. The program focuses on addressing issues in high-crime neighborhoods. The youth are given a space to do their homework, and the program allows speakers from the local community to speak to the youth, and staff have the opportunity to teach a skill such as information technology and life skills.
- People who have lived experience can send an impactful message to youth.
- Family engagement is important because we need to be sure we're acknowledging the families as well. It is important to include and address the needs of families while supporting directly impacted youth. We can support the kid as best we can and offer different programs, but at the end of the day, we have to consider how the families are affecting the kids.
- "Credible messengers": Someone in the community who visits the youth at home and supports the youth and their family. These folks are familiar with the community. They have been impactful, and they have a passion to make sure these families are doing well. It's important for these folks to understand how the different state government systems work (child protective services, child welfare, juvenile justice) and for these mentors with lived experiences to understand how these communities work and can relate to the youth.

2. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to open up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Funding for effective programs. For some reason, many people believe probation is the solution. This is because there is a lack of evidence-based programs for community-based organizations. Being able to give the community the supports to offer the kids resources and supports, is key. We need to consider the factors that make good use of time with the youth, prior to their involvement with the juvenile justice system.



- More funding for intervention programs and community-based programs and offer support for local community-based organizations that have a direct impact on the youth and families.
- Failing schools, gangs, and healthy nutrition are some of the biggest challenges facing our region. Another challenge is finding people to do the work, and without staff to do the work, the basic needs for families aren't being met. There are private school options, but many families cannot afford it. That said, opening up opportunities is further down the priority list because those basic needs must be met.

3. Please share your ideas for reducing referrals and the flow of youth from the mental health system to juvenile justice.

- Detection and early intervention are key.
- Ensuring mental health services are in place is a critical piece. Developmental programs have been put in place throughout the state to ensure we're meeting the needs of youth.
- Creating a linkage for mental health services for youth and families.
- There is a lack of education and awareness for mental health services; many road blocks are in place for families to become educated or aware of mental health supports.
- Collaboration and coordination have to occur between juvenile justice and the local mental health authorities.
- Probation officers are having to become more knowledgeable about supports and routines if a youth or family is having a mental health crisis to help walk them through what is needed.
- Kids with individualized education programs (IEPs) are also being placed in the juvenile justice system that should not be there. The system is not built for kids with mental health needs. Many young people don't have access to early intervention for mental health problems.
- More cross-system collaboration and coordination. Everyone needs to come to the table and discuss how to improve outcomes for youth and how we stop sending them to the juvenile justice system.
- [State] has established early identification in schools by placing mental health coordinators in every school so children would be assessed by a social worker or nurse. This program has been piloted in five counties and now it's been expanded across the state.

4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for opening up opportunities for system-involved youth should be?

- Resource centers where youth are automatically referred to resources and services. For example, if a child is under a specific age, they can go to the resource center. The resource center may be a place for housing or to reacclimate in the community as well as receive appropriate life-skills trainings. Teaching the children different skills such as computer skills or cooking would be helpful. Developing the kids' sense of self-worth will go a long way.
- Building off the strengths of the kids. There is an assumption that these kids lack specific skill sets. Much of what they know is already based on survival, but if we can build off of the positive things, we can build up their positive attributes such as money management, organization, computer skills, etc., and redirect those aspects to do something positive in the future. Many of these youth have the business mindset, and this is something we can build off of.



5. What can OJJDP do to advance this key priority through the kinds of strategies and activities it undertakes? (For example, communications, webinars and training, publications, policy guidelines, and pilot programs.)

- Provide a platform to speak with different TTA providers, juvenile justice professionals, mental health professionals, educators, etc., to discuss best practices and what works well versus what does not. This will help start the conversation to tackle the issues.
 - Advocate for youth and family voice. Host panels with directly impacted families and youth and provide the space and opportunity for them to share their thoughts on what they need, the good and the bad. As professionals in the field, many times we have great case plans, goals, and objectives, etc., and all of these things are pretty, but at the end of the day, how are we recognizing youth and family voices through the case management systems? How are we strengthening the voice of families and kids? We should be creating a platform for them to share their experience of what's in their best interest.
 - Reacclimating a youth into the community after transitioning out of the juvenile justice system creates a sense of "the unknown." It might be helpful to match the youth with a counselor once they reenter their communities. Maybe OJJDP can partner with counseling agencies to discuss potential opportunities for youth. We have to consider the kid's interests as well. There may be a stigma around attending resource centers or meeting with a counselor. It's important to ask the youth questions about home life, their personal interests, and what types of resources they may need.
- a. What types of trainings or webinars would it be helpful for OJJDP to develop on the topic of opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?**
- Increase training opportunities. OJJDP may consider mandatory trainings for educators to go through a program where they'll learn how to address some of these issues. The more they know, the more prepared they can be. We want to get all parties involved in the child's life, whether it's the educator or grandparent, and get them all on the same page. This training can include training on how we address issues the child is facing before they enter the juvenile justice system.
 - Training on cultural awareness, diversity, and equitable practices. Impacted communities are feeling strongly about law enforcement and other entities. We must consider how we come across when working with impacted communities and how we're measuring equitable practices.
 - Trainings and discussions on youth and family voice. How do we integrate their voices into our policies and guidance when responding to the field?

6. How can OJJDP support better cross-system collaboration to lead to improved opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- The best way to cross-system plan would be to get all the federal government agencies together at the table. But also, any agency that touches a child—whether it's from the health field, education, child welfare, etc.—sitting at the table with these agencies so that we ensure the basic needs are also being met.



- We need to make sure youth voices are also at the table. We rarely address the true needs because organizations are always focused on ways to save money. The best way to do this would be to include the children in these conversations so they can share their thoughts on what they need.
- Going back to the basics. This means having everyone at the table from various agencies and programs to discuss the goals and objectives of what we want and go from there. If all the voices are at the table, we have a chance to ask folks WHY they are doing the things they are doing.