



WRAPAROUND AND JUVENILE JUSTICE: MAKING A CONNECTION THAT WORKS

My role as a family assistance specialist is defined as helping to make sure that the parent voice is heard and helping to locate and access community services, but I find that much of the assistance I provide is way outside this realm. Yes, I do take parents to meetings with other agencies, but more value is often found in the car ride there than my presence at the meeting. I am able to talk about what is happening in their lives and share stories of my own experiences to help them feel less isolated and alone. I do try to make sure that their opinions are clearly heard in the meetings and yet much of what we talk about never makes it to the meeting room. We cry together, we laugh together, we share together, and that is where the true “assistance” comes in.

—Patricia Roe, a family assistance specialist at Connections

The name *Connections* expresses the idea that the needs of youth and families are met best when all the pieces of the service and support “puzzle” are interlocked. One of the ways that these connections are facilitated is through the work of family assistance specialists, like Patricia Roe, who is quoted throughout this

article. But truly bringing together service providers, families, and members of their natural support systems around a common mission entails moving beyond conventional thinking about how services are provided. Through collaboration with those that have a stake in successful outcomes for youth and families, appropriate and effective service and support strategies can be developed.

The Connections program grew out of the realization that, in Clark County, Washington, many youth were simultaneously receiving services in both the juvenile justice and mental health systems. Recognizing the unique needs of juvenile offenders with behavioral health issues, the county developed a specialized program designed to integrate services and coordinate resources to meet the need of these young people and their families.

The Connections program was implemented in October 2001. The program represents a partnership between the juvenile court and the mental health community that is designed to enhance services through stronger community connections. Using a Wraparound/Individualized and Tailored Care model, Connec-

tions employs a strength-based approach to link youth and families to local resources so as to better meet their individual needs. To this end, families are full partners in developing, delivering, and implementing interventions.

Program Features

When I was raising my son, I never dreamed that his teenage years could be so awful. This child who had been the light of my life for 12 years suddenly turned into the child of Frankenstein. I understand how the parents in our program must feel. We love our kids but we hate them at the same time. I think that one of the greatest values of this program is helping parents work their way through this. We help to normalize behaviors and rebuild the connection between family and child, the most important connection anyone has in this life.

Innovative juvenile justice service delivery. Connections is designed to deter youth from continued criminal activity and to stabilize them by establishing effective community-based support systems that will remain in place after court-ordered supervision

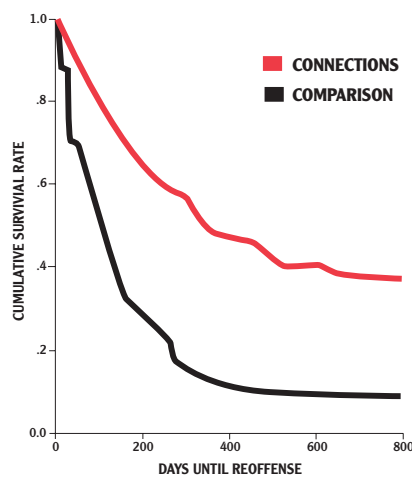


Figure 1. Survival curve—time until reoffense

expires. Program staff work collaboratively with youth and families in the wraparound model to build on youth and family strengths, address identified needs, and connect families to interventions and resources. Families are considered equal partners in the Connections program. Each family involved in the program is assigned to a family assistance specialist whose primary role is to support and advocate for the parents of probationary youth.

Specific program goals include reducing recidivism, probation violations, and detention days. Additionally, the program aims to reduce the episodes and length of time in out-of-home care, increase protective factors, improve child functioning, increase family stability, and increase the family’s capacity to provide adequate supervision and supports for youth.

Varied staff expertise. Connections staff are extremely dedicated to serving the families within the program in flexible and innovative ways. Because of the unique approach of this program and its goal of serving families’ various needs, staff are frequently required to work long and odd hours. One of the program’s unique aspects is that it brings together individuals with various areas of expertise within the juvenile jus-

tice system. The program consists of four teams composed of four full-time staff each, with a joint caseload for each team of approximately 25 youth and their families. The team includes a probation counselor, a juvenile services associate, a care coordinator, and a family assistance specialist. Each of these roles is described in more detail below. The program also employs a part-time clinical psychologist. All of the program positions were created with flexible work schedules in order to accommodate the needs of families. Connections contracts out for psychiatric services including medication management.

The probation counselor provides probation services that promote community safety, provide services to victims, increase youth competencies, and provide offender accountability, all under the umbrella of balanced and restorative justice principles. The responsibilities of the probation counselor include receiving and examining referrals to the juvenile court, making recommendations to the court regarding the need for continued detention, arranging and supervising diversion agreements, preparing predisposition studies, being present at the disposition hearing to respond to questions regarding the report, and supervising court orders of disposition.

The care coordinator/mental health therapist facilitates the wraparound planning process. In collaboration with the wraparound team, the care coordinator helps identify strengths, determine needs, and identify both formal and informal supports and

resources. The care coordinator is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the team’s plan, brokering services, providing written wraparound team meeting summaries, conducting mental health assessments, and providing crisis family counseling and intervention.

The juvenile services associate works primarily with the youth to set goals and develop an individual action plan to meet court and service requirements. Serving as a resource, mentor, and role model to program youth, a juvenile service associate provides advocacy services, teaches skills, and supervises restorative community service activities, all as part of an overall effort to increase competencies in youth.

The family assistance specialist is assigned to each family to assist with strengths assessment, system navigation, mentoring, support, and advocacy. Family assistance specialists are trained to empower families into action. They help families identify and connect with informal supports including relatives, friends, teachers, and church volunteers. As advocates, they help the families state their needs and make community connections. They make certain that the parent’s voice is heard.

The staff clinical psychologist provides twenty hours per week to the program. In addition to performing psychological evaluations and assisting with program development, the psychologist is available to staff cases, consult with teams, and provide direct services to youth.

Family advisory committee. The

Table 1. Post-entry detention days over 790 days of follow-up information

	Connections	Comparison
Number and percentage serving detention days	71 (73%)	95 (97%)
Among youth who served detention post-entry		
Mean number of detention days per episode per youth	13	14
Mean number of detention episodes per youth	4.4	7.5
Mean number of total detention days per youth	59	102

family advisory committee was created as an avenue for youth and parents to participate in program development and ensure family collaboration. The committee members act as advisors to the management of the Connections program. Specifically, the committee makes recommendations, reviews polices and best practice guidelines, and provides consultation to the program. The committee is comprised of participating family members and program staff.

A number of innovative ideas have emerged as a result of this collaboration.

For example, at the suggestion of families, binders detailing the program are created for families to help them manage information as they enter Connections. The family advisory committee also recommends activities such as an annual picnic and holiday open house that brings together Connections staff and participating families for informal gatherings. Families have also contributed to the development of family-friendly pamphlets and newsletters.

Outcomes

This program has allowed me to help other parents rediscover that they, and their families, can be successful. They can once again have dreams and achieve them. It sometimes means helping them modify their personal goals, and encouraging them to allow their kids to have goals of their own. The true value for me is when I meet with a parent and they are finally able to see that progress is being made. And when those big goals are met, it is amazing. There are no greater thanks.

In its first three years of operation, the Connections program has served over 200 youth and families, and it has demonstrated excellent outcomes. When compared to a similar sample of probationary youth with



mental health problems that were receiving traditional community mental health services, youth in the Connections program were less than half as likely to re-offend. Among youth who re-offended, those in Connections re-offended about half as many times as youth from the comparison group. Furthermore, in cases where youth in Connections did re-offend, they tended to commit less serious crimes. A time-to event analysis (Kaplan-Meier Survival) of the first hundred youth enrolled in Connections revealed that they also took significantly longer to re-offend. Half of the comparison group had re-offended by 100 days after identification, whereas it took 350 days for half of the Connections youth to re-offend (Log-rank (1) = 38.01, $p < .01$; see Figure 1).

Because of reduced recidivism, Connections youth used fewer detention days; in fact, over a two-year period after identification, 27% percent of Connections youth served no detention days at all; this compares to only 3% of the comparison group (see Table 1). Of the youth who did serve detention days, Connections youth had roughly 40% fewer detention episodes and total days. This difference in detention days may translate into significant cost savings because holding youth in detention

is very expensive.

Besides juvenile records, other measures also reveal improved functioning. Youth in Connections were interviewed at intake, 6-month, and 12-month follow-up about their involvement with various delinquent activities. By their own accounts, from intake to 12 months, fewer youth were engaging in many of the most common activities, including vandalizing property, being part of a gang, buying or selling stolen goods, breaking into a house or car, and threatening others with weapons.

They also reported less substance use and better overall functioning. Youth in Connections had significantly more strengths and significantly fewer problems between intake and 12 months, according to caregiver ratings on the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, the Child Behavior Checklist, and the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale.

Conclusion

The value of working in wrap-around, and particularly in the Connections program, becomes clear when I can sit in court with a parent and watch their child take responsibility and consequences and feel a sense of pride for how far they have come.

Connections is an innovative service planning and delivery mechanism for juvenile justice that relies on building working relationships with entire families in order to meet the needs of the youth. The improved functioning, decreased recidivism, and decreased detention days demonstrate the value of non-traditional services, family participation in planning, family support, and a family-centered approach. While undeniably there are struggles with integrating wraparound principles and values with juvenile justice,

Connections is evidence that with ongoing efforts and dedicated staff it can be done.

Please visit our evaluation website for more detailed information about the Connections and Clark County System of Care evaluation, at <http://www.rri.pdx.edu/ClarkCo/>.

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