



POLK COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL

DEFLECTION AND DIVERSION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Date: December 2, 2024

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Location: Polk County Behavioral Health & Disability Services (River Place)

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joseph Johnson (Change Course), Rachel Adams (BHDS), Greg Stallman (Altoona PD), John Hawkins (Juvenile Court Services), Stephanie Swartz (Des Moines PD) Eric Kool (Polk County Youth Services), Jay Hansen (Polk County) Jose Ruesga (Change Course), Jerry Evans (CJCC).

MEMBERS ABSENT: Kameron Middlebrooks (Reform Alliance), Kimberly Graham (Polk County Attorney), Darnell Loatman (FOCUSS), Stacie Nessa (Des Moines Public Schools),

GUESTS: None

ACTIVITY:

1. Meeting called to order by Chair Johnson.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

2. Group members were asked to express what they hoped to accomplish from being a part of this committee. Jose Ruesga shared that what often gets overlooked are the true needs of youth who are struggling. For example, they are using drugs not because they are addicts, but because it replaces something that is missing in their life. Accordingly, while deflection/diversion is the title for this subcommittee, he would like to see this group focus on meeting the individual needs of the justice involved youth as a way to address their behavior. In his opinion, their behaviors are a direct result of their needs not being addressed.
3. Joseph Johnson enquired about the role non-profits occupy in working with troubled youth. Discussion followed that centered around the fact that unfortunately, many of the service providers are not well known to those who could benefit from their services. Moreover, there is a lack of coordination among the non-profit service provides (i.e., silos).
4. Jerry Evans provided a proposed grid for how to create standardization for diversion efforts among law enforcement agencies. The grid was simply a starting point that recognized many municipalities already had their own diversion programs (i.e., DMPD 2nd Chance Program).

5. John Hawkins brought up the effects that diversion programs have with Juvenile Court Services and the statewide requirements for JCS diversions. As an example, if DMPD have a youth who fails to comply with their 2nd Chance Program due to picking up a second misdemeanor charge, if that youth is referred to JCS, JCS will be required consider the 2nd offense as a 1st offense since this is a first-time referral to their department. Common practice to address first-time misdemeanors is a letter sent to the youth and their parents explaining that as long as they don't violate any future laws, no further action will be taken. This means that even though the youth failed the 2nd chance program, the only consequence for their failure will be receiving a letter from JCS. Some people view this as "nothing being done."
6. Stephanie Swartz pointed out that while she was not aware of this, the DMPD 2nd Chance Program refers very few youths to JCS. Which means, the vast majority of the juveniles they work with complete their program and "shrink the net" of possible referrals to JCS.
7. Greg Stallman pointed out that a lot of the work being done by his department with youth is not being tracked. And, while they don't refer very many cases to JCS, they are still working to deflect/divert juveniles in his community. (Stephanie Swartz offered to send their 2nd Chance Outline to use a guide as needed.)
8. The discussion ended with a consensus from the group that the best way for this subcommittee to be effective would be to focus on prevention and intervention initiatives focusing on unaddressed juvenile needs prior to them even encountering law enforcement or committing an unlawful offense.

Frequency of Subcommittee Meetings

1. The members decided the frequency of the meetings needed to be changed from bi-monthly to monthly in order to create better continuity. Moving forward, the subcommittee meetings will be scheduled for the 1st Monday of the month, every other month, at 10:30 a.m. at River Place. (Unless a conflict exists)

Closing

2. The subcommittee meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m. Next scheduled meeting will be January 6, 2025 at 10:30 a.m. at River Place. Conference Room #3.