

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS FROM THE NATIONAL CROSS-SITE EVALUATION OF JUVENILE DRUG COURTS AND RECLAIMING FUTURES

Raanan Kagan — Erika M. Ostlie

This commentary presents policy and program implications from the National Cross-Site Evaluation of Juvenile Drug Courts and Reclaiming Futures, highlighting findings that are relevant to policy makers and program managers who wish to create or enhance a juvenile drug court (JDC) or JDC/Reclaiming Futures (RF) program site. This commentary also examines policy implications stemming from the differential outcomes of JDC-only and JDC/RF programs, and offers policy recommendations for JDC-only, JDC/RF, and non-JDC programs that provide substance use disorder treatment to youth in the juvenile justice system.

FINDINGS FROM the National Cross-Site Evaluation of Juvenile Drug Courts and Reclaiming Futures (JDC/RF National Evaluation) have policy implications for both juvenile justice and juvenile substance use treatment. As Dennis, Baumer, and Stevens point out elsewhere in this volume, the JDC/RF National Evaluation is the first comprehensive examination of the integration of juvenile drug courts (JDCs) and Reclaiming Futures (RF). As such, it contributes significantly to the body of knowledge about JDC and RF—both individually and together. But results from this evaluation also offer practical information that practitioners can use to implement effective programs or improve existing programs to better serve their target populations. The findings have implications for policy, which can further advance the field of juvenile justice and the overall success of substance-using adolescents in the juvenile justice system. This commentary highlights policy and program implications and recommendations

from the JDC/RF National Evaluation related to (1) maximizing the utility of JDC programs, (2) integrating RF within JDCs, and (3) implementing effective program characteristics for programs serving substance using youth in the juvenile justice system.

MAXIMIZING THE UTILITY OF JDC PROGRAMS: TARGET POPULATION AND PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Most notably, the JDC/RF National Evaluation found that policy makers can maximize the effectiveness of JDC and JDC/RF programs by serving juveniles with high clinical need (i.e., significant substance use problems) and high criminality (Korchmaros, Baumer, & Valdez, 2016 [this volume]). JDC programs had desirable effects on substance use and criminal behavior, making a strong case that, although JDC programs are often small and relatively expensive, they are highly successful programs.

To maximize the benefit of JDC programs and reduce the likelihood of future crime and societal burden, policy makers should ensure that JDC programs target youth with high levels of criminal activity and/or clinical problems, or *high-need* youth. Because JDCs are resource-intensive programs, some policy makers may be concerned about the costs of JDCs. However, JDCs can be exceptionally successful in terms of reduced substance use and reduced criminal behavior, especially if they serve high-need youth. Since many adult criminals begin their offending careers as juveniles, JDC programs offer one promising approach to help curtail future criminal activity, by identifying and treating youth early in the life course, thus promoting public safety and saving taxpayer dollars.

To ensure that JDC programs can effectively target this population, we recommend that jurisdictions implement screening, assessment, and eligibility policies that target high-need youth for JDC enrollment. First, jurisdictions should modify their JDC eligibility criteria to give preference to such youth. To facilitate the identification and enrollment of appropriate youth, jurisdictions should also implement evidence-based, standardized, and valid screening tools early in their juvenile justice sys-

tem's enrollment process. This ensures that each youth who enters the juvenile justice system is screened for potential JDC enrollment without relying on a personal referral. In addition, this screening process should be implemented in tandem with an evidence-based clinical assessment, which should be used after youth are screened and referred for JDC enrollment. This assessment can verify that youth are clinically appropriate for a JDC program and help shape youth treatment plans.

Finally, evidence from Korchmaros et al. (2016) indicates that (1) frequent drug testing, (2) gender-responsive treatment, and (3) coordination with the school system were each more effective with high-crime youth. In light of the evidence that JDC and JDC/RF programs have success with this population, and our recommendation to target JDC program eligibility toward these youth, JDC policy makers should include these components in their programs. It is noteworthy that these program components—frequent and random drug testing, gender-responsive treatment, and coordination with the school system—are already critical components of the Integrated JDC/RF Logic Model (Carnevale Associates & University of Arizona, 2014), which examines the implementation of Reclaiming Futures and *Juvenile Drug Courts: Strategies in Practice* (Greene, Ostlie, Kagan, & Davis, 2016 [this volume]; National Drug Court Institute & National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 2003). In addition, because the JDC/RF National Evaluation also found that more frequent testing might not be associated with desirable outcomes for youth with lower levels of criminal involvement, JDC programs that serve youth with lower levels of crime might consider using less stringent drug-testing protocols. Meanwhile, JDC programs that serve youth with varying levels of criminal activity should use different drug testing frequencies for these distinct populations, possibly by separating youth into different program “tracks.”

INTEGRATING RECLAIMING FUTURES AND JDC PROGRAMS

The JDC/RF National Evaluation was unique in that it examined the integration of JDC and RF programs. While the evaluation adds to

the body of knowledge about JDC and RF individually, it also makes a major contribution to understanding how these systems function together. Greene et al. (2016) discuss the creation of an integrated logic model (JDC/RF Logic Model) and explore the implications of the model for future JDC/RF implementations. Importantly, the authors note that JDC and RF are highly complementary models. In fact, interviews with key JDC/RF staff indicated that many drug court professionals saw the incorporation of RF as a shift in focus, rather than a fundamental change. In addition, Korchmaros et al. (2016) note the near ubiquity of the *Juvenile Drug Courts: Strategies in Practice* within the field, finding that nearly all studied sites—including intensive outpatient programs that were not JDCs—incorporated most aspects of the JDC strategies. Yet JDC/RF programs still differ in significant ways from JDCs that do not implement RF, and the evaluation helps elucidate those differences.

Beyond contributing to the conceptual understanding of the JDC/RF Logic Model, findings from the evaluation indicate that JDC/RF programs might be more successful than JDC-only programs at serving the high-need youth that all JDC programs should target. The evaluation found that JDC/RF programs were more successful than JDC-only programs at reducing crime-related outcomes among high-crime youth, as measured by both illegal activity and number of crimes committed (Korchmaros et al., 2016). JDC/RF programs also provided significantly more behavioral health services than JDC-only programs. So, while the evaluation does not necessarily support an endorsement of JDC/RF over JDC alone, it indicates that policy makers may wish to consider JDC/RF programs over JDC-only implementations.

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

The JDC/RF National Evaluation analyzed the critical characteristics of programs that provide substance use treatment to youth in the juvenile justice system. The following program characteristics were related to reductions in substance use or criminal behavior among program clients, regardless of whether the clients were enrolled in a

JDC-only, JDC/RF, or an intensive outpatient program (Korchmaros et al., 2016):

- Having a defined target population and eligibility criteria
- Using policies and procedures that are responsive to cultural differences
- Providing prosocial activities
- Coordinating with the school system
- Providing mentoring programs
- Using sanctions to modify noncompliance
- Administering frequent drug tests
- Utilizing gender-appropriate treatment

These findings support a growing body of evidence that encourages implementing several program components in any substance use treatment program that targets youth in the juvenile justice system—including, but not limited to, JDC programs. Additionally, Greene, Thompson-Dyck, Wright, and Davis (2016 [this volume]) provide a useful discussion of the challenges and successful strategies for implementing or expanding programs to include these characteristics, notably prosocial activities and mentoring programs. Collectively, the findings indicate that programs providing substance use treatment to the juvenile justice population should include (1) gender-appropriate treatment,¹ (2) culturally responsive policies,² (3) prosocial activities, and (4) mentoring programs. Once again, it is noteworthy that each of these program characteristics is included within the integrated JDC/RF Logic Model, so implementing JDC/RF with fidelity would necessarily entail implementing these program components.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The JDC/RF National Evaluation provides valuable contributions to the field at the research, policy, and program levels. The evaluation

¹ Although gender-appropriate treatment within juvenile justice populations is often discussed in the context of ensuring that programs implement a female-focused component, numerous promising approaches also cater specifically to adolescent males.

² Findings from the JDC/RF National Evaluation demonstrate that culturally responsive policies can, in fact, yield better outcomes than the alternative, and thus merit careful attention from policy makers.

continues to bolster the body of evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of JDC programs; however, it also offers considerable (and new) support for JDC/RF programs—helping us to develop an understanding of the nuances of those related approaches. In addition, the evaluation offers guidance on how to best utilize JDC programs and JDC/RF programs to maximize society’s return on investment. To that end, this volume offers considerable guidance for policy makers and program managers who wish to leverage these findings to improve programs.

Examining the conceptual overlap of the JDC and RF models provides an important starting point for understanding the similarities, differences, and corresponding policy implications of each approach (JDC/RF versus JDC-only). Furthermore, identifying the specific program characteristics linked to reductions in substance use and criminal behavior provides new information to affect policy and program decisions beyond JDC programs. Future studies should continue to examine the similarities, differences, and differential effects of JDC-only and JDC/RF programs to help policy makers and program managers make informed decisions.

This manuscript reflects the authors’ original work.

The University of Arizona’s Institutional Review Board declared this study non-human subjects research because of its utilization of existing, de-identified data and of data about program characteristics.

The development of this commentary was funded by the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), through an interagency agreement with the Library of Congress (contract number LCFRD11C0007), and by OJJDP (grant number 2013-DC-BX-0081). The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official policies of OJJDP or the Library of Congress; nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

REFERENCES

- Carnevale Associates & University of Arizona–Southwest Institute for Research on Women. (2014). *National Cross-Site Evaluation of Juvenile Drug Courts and Reclaiming Futures: Normative expectations of the Integrated JDC/RF Drug Court Logic Model—January 2014*. Tucson: University of Arizona.
- Dennis, M.L., Baumer, P.C., & Stevens, S. (2016). The concurrent evolution and intertwined nature of juvenile drug courts and Reclaiming Futures approaches to juvenile justice reform. *Drug Court Review*, 10(1), 6–30.
- Greene, A., Ostlie, E., Kagan, R., & Davis, M. (2016). The process of integrating practices: The Juvenile Drug Court and Reclaiming Futures Logic Model. *Drug Court Review*, 10(1), 31–59.
- Greene, A., Thompson-Dyck, K., Wright, M.S. Davis, M., & Haverly, K. (2016). Community engagement: Perspectives on an essential element of juvenile drug courts implementing Reclaiming Futures. *Drug Court Review*, 10(1), 116–154.
- Korchmaros, J.D., Baumer, P.C., & Valdez, E.S. (2016). Critical components of adolescent substance use treatment programs: The impact of *Juvenile Drug Court: Strategies in Practice* and elements of Reclaiming Futures. *Drug Court Review*, 10(1), 80–115.
- National Drug Court Institute & National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (2003). *Juvenile drug courts: Strategies in practice* (Bureau of Justice Assistance monograph). Rockville, MD: Bureau of Justice Assistance. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/bja/197866.pdf>

Raanan Kagan, BA, director of health policy research at Carnevale Associates, LLC, has nearly a decade of experience in behavioral health policy, strategic consulting, and government project management. Clients include the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Washington D.C. Department of Behavioral Health, and the National Council on Problem Gambling. He has managed several evaluations of state-level substance use treatment programs and is an expert in the Affordable Care Act's effects on behavioral health financing. Mr. Kagan received his bachelor's degree in philosophy cum laude from the University of Maryland at College Park.

Erika M. Ostlie, MA, managing director of Carnevale Associates, LLC, has over 15 years in the behavioral health field. She specializes in translating complex data into manageable information that policy makers and program managers can use to inform everyday decisions. During her tenure with the firm, she has managed contracts related to performance measurement, strategic planning, research and evaluation, and development of drug strategies. She also authors and oversees evaluation surveys, serving clients such as the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and the Charlottesville, Virginia, Adult Drug Court. She received her master's degree in criminology and criminal justice from the University of Maryland at College Park.

Direct correspondence to Raanan Kagan, Carnevale Associates, LLC, P.O. Box 84085, Gaithersburg, MD 20883. (301) 802-0441. raanan@carnevaleassociates.com