

## DIVERTING YOUTH FROM THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

### WHY AND HOW

POLICY UPDATE | DECEMBER 2012

Diversion programs are quite varied, but all involve mechanisms to minimize a youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system.

#### What We Know

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- **For the vast majority of youth, diversion is more effective at addressing delinquency than formal system processing.**<sup>1</sup>  
Formal system processing actually has a negative effect as compared to diversion; diversion with services has the most positive effect.<sup>2</sup>
- **Diversion programs are more cost-effective than formal system processing.** Even if diversion programs were more expensive than system processing, the fact that diversion is more effective at reducing crime would, in the long run, make it a less expensive option than formal processing.<sup>3</sup>
- **Formal processing backfires most with higher-risk youth.** Youth with prior offenses—who may seem to be most deserving of a formal response—increased their delinquent behavior when subjected to formal system processing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony Petrosino, Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino, and Sarah Guckenburg, “Formal System Processing of Juveniles: Effects on Delinquency,” Campbell Systematic Reviews (2010): 32. Accessed on December 17, 2012, at [http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/news/\\_/formal\\_processing\\_reduce\\_juvenile\\_delinquency.php](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/news/_/formal_processing_reduce_juvenile_delinquency.php). This “negative effect” includes crime measures of prevalence (the number of offenders who commit new offenses), incidence (the number of offenses committed by each person) and severity (severity or harm caused by new offenses), as well as self-report data on offending behavior.

<sup>2</sup>Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, Guckenburg, “Formal System Processing,” 32.

<sup>3</sup>Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, Guckenburg, “Formal System Processing,” 38.

<sup>4</sup>Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, Guckenburg, “Formal System Processing,” 34-35.

## ***The Juvenile Diversion Guidebook***

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Juvenile diversion programs have been successfully implemented around the country—resulting in improved outcomes for youth, cost-savings, and increased public safety. Recognizing the benefits of diversion, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, through its Models for Change initiative, convened a Juvenile Diversion work group that included organizations like: the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform; National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice; the National Juvenile Defender Center; the National Youth Screening Project; and the Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps. Together, they created the *Juvenile Diversion Guidebook*, a resource that offers users practical insight, advice, and direction in developing and improving diversion programs.

Diversion programs are widespread and, not surprisingly, differ in their eligibility criteria, referral process, and services provided. The *Juvenile Diversion Guidebook* focuses specifically on diversion programs that reduce youths’ exposure to formal court system processing and an adjudication of delinquency.<sup>5</sup> The *Guidebook* gives practitioners a comprehensive roadmap for how to implement this type of juvenile diversion program in their jurisdiction.

### **Why Use this Guide?**

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The *Juvenile Diversion Guidebook* includes:

- A review of the range of diversion programs and state diversion statutes found throughout the country.
- A 16-step plan to guide users through the critical questions and decisions relevant to implementing or improving a diversion program. For each step, the *Guidebook* offers the various options and the pros and cons of each. The 16 steps are divided into six categories: purpose; oversight; intake criteria; operation policies; legal protections; quality.
- A juvenile diversion workbook -- an interactive tool to help planners identify which options are best suited to the needs in their jurisdiction.

For more information and to access the *Guidebook*, please visit <http://bit.ly/R2pWsn>.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that the guide does not include diversion from pre-trial secure detention, or diversion after formal adjudication.