Stakeholders' Perspectives of Reentry to School and Community for Young Offenders With Disabilities: An Ecological Approach

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Abstract

Reentry services for young offenders need to be youth-focused and inclusive of the multiple entities that support a youth's return to the community. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding from stakeholders' perspectives, based on experience, to identify challenges and facilitators to support young offenders' reengagement in school and successful return to their community postincarceration. Fifty-four qualitative interviews of key stakeholders involved in the reentry process were conducted across 4 years of a young offender with disabilities' reentry program in the Northwest. Stakeholders included youth, parents, school personnel, parole/probation officers, and other community agency personnel. An ecological framework coding scheme was used to qualitatively analyze the interviews. Findings validate the importance a key adult/mentor (i.e., transition specialist) plays in a youth's school engagement. In addition, developing strong working relationships within and across schools, juvenile services, and other key agency personnel was supportive of a young offender's reentry process.

Keywords

juvenile justice, students with disabilities, transition-to-adulthood, young offenders, interagency collaboration

Formerly incarcerated youth have a high likelihood of continuing criminal behavior in adolescence and into young adulthood (Archwamety & Katsiyannis, 2000; Brame et al., 2018). Youth displaying criminal behavior will manifest continuing problems—at least to some degree—in their future work, school, and family endeavors as adults (e.g., Bullis et al., 2004; Carter, 2019). Relative to continued criminal activity, at least 45% of youth offenders are likely to be arrested for another crime after release (Wilson et al., 2003). Specifically, states have reported that slightly more than half of youth who are incarcerated recidivate within 1 year of release. Being a young offender is a strong predictor for school dropout (Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Na, 2017) or even returning to a school setting postrelease (Cavendish, 2014; Foley, 2001), with only 8% of young offenders earning any type of high school diploma in the 3 years postrelease (Foley, 2001). Furthermore, arrested youth are more likely to have failed a grade and to have been enrolled in remedial or special education (Foley, 2001; Kirk & Sampson, 2013). Quinn et al. (2005) found that the average of youth with disabilities across the United States involved in the juvenile justice system was 33%, with a range from 9.1% to 77.5%. Mitigating and attending to these risks upon release from juvenile services may decrease continued criminality into adulthood.

Recent focus on reentry has led to broad recommendations for a set of coordinated efforts across agencies to address these risk factors (Carter, 2019; Cavendish, 2014; Johnson et al., 2017; Na, 2017). For example, recommendations have included required school enrollment with attendance monitoring for postrelease juvenile services (Cavendish, 2014; Na, 2017). Unfortunately, there is no one juvenile services system as it varies by state, county, and potentially municipalities, resulting in a lack of a comprehensive system for how youth reentry occurs to support establishing collaboration between juvenile services, schools, and other community agencies. Currently, there are only sets of guidelines or recommended practices from different juvenile justice-focused agencies. Almost half of U.S. states lack a single agency responsible for the transition of incarcerated youth, and only 11 states employ a designated

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education transition liaison (The Council of State Governments Justice Center [CSGJC], 2015). Less than half of states provide postincarceration oversight to identify whether youth are enrolled in public school or a General Educational Development (GED) program. This lack of a common, coordinated system leads to difficulties in collaboration within juvenile correctional facilities and between families, facilities, schools, and other community agencies that can contribute to a youth's successful reentry. Mathur and Griller Clark (2014), in a study utilizing multiple juvenile justice stakeholder groups, found that even though stakeholders reported a strong perception of interagency collaboration, they reported a lack of awareness of practices and supports available for young offenders during the reentry process. Waintrup and Unruh (2008) reported that there was a lack of knowledge of other agencies' scope of services (i.e., eligibility, referrals/enrollment, and services) or formalized data sharing mechanisms across agencies.

Rocque et al. (2014) reported that across-agency collaborations were essential for implementing and sustaining evidence-based practices at a state level. Recently, Mathur et al. (2017) published research-based practices for reintegrating students with emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD) from the juvenile justice system. Mathur et al. (2017) outlined that the coordinated practices that should be implemented between the juvenile justice system and the educational setting the youth is entering within the first 30 days. These practices include (a) developing awareness and knowledge about the juvenile justice system from which the youth is transitioning; (b) meeting with the transition team from the juvenile justice system, youth, and family; (c) expediting transfer of records, checking credits earned, and reviewing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP); (d) providing evidence-based practices (academic, social, emotional, and vocational competence); (e) monitoring youth progress; and (f) engaging in reflective practice.

Given the risk factors for young offenders returning to their school, community, and family, (Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Na, 2017), coupled with the barriers to building strong interagency collaborations between juvenile services and schools (CSGJC, 2015; Mathur & Griller Clark, 2014), this study aims to provide a better understanding of stakeholders' perspectives, and identify challenges and facilitators to support young offenders' reengagement in school and successful return to their community postincarceration. Our primary research questions were

Research Question 1: What are the perceived barriers and challenges to interagency collaboration for successful reengagement for youth offenders with disabilities into their school, family, and community?
Research Question 2: What strategies foster or facilitate interagency collaboration to overcome barriers and support successful reengagement for youth offenders with disabilities in their school family, and community?

Method

Theoretical Framework

Our study utilized a phenomenological qualitative approach grounded in Ecological Systems Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dishion & Patterson, 2006). We sought to understand the experiences of youth, families, school personnel, parole/probation officers, and other community agency personnel to identify challenges that hinder as well as facilitators that support young offenders' school reengagement and successful return to their community postincarceration. We chose a qualitative approach to describe and explain the processes involved in a reentry program for young offenders with disabilities (Brantlinger et al., 2005). This method also lends itself to ensuring that narrative transparency is apparent by utilizing the voices and agendas of the multiple stakeholders involved in the reentry process (Trainor & Graue, 2014). The ecological framework accounts for multiple social systems (e.g., schools, juvenile services, and family) that affect and/or influence an adolescent offender, grounded in the larger context of the community involving multiple stakeholders. As shown in Figure 1, Dishion and Patterson (2006) elaborated on this framework by noting how the individual must navigate within multiple behavioral settings (e.g., juvenile services, school, and home) with varied relationship dynamics (e.g., teachers, parole officers [POs], and family). In other words, the young offender must know which social skills and behaviors are appropriate for each setting and each individual with whom they are interacting within a given setting. For example, the youth needs to choose specific, appropriate behaviors in a school setting when interacting with their teacher and choose different appropriate behaviors when interacting with their peers in the same setting. Dishion and Patterson (2006) further asserted that specific to youth demonstrating antisocial behavior, the relationship dynamics are a critical juncture in which interventions can support increasing self-regulatory behaviors to identify appropriate behaviors for specific personnel (e.g., teachers) in a behavioral setting (e.g., schools). Specific to this study focusing on a successful reentry of young offenders to their school, family, and community, the behavioral settings and relationship dynamics consisted of (a) juvenile services and parole/probation officers, (b) school and teachers/transition specialists (TSs), and (c) home and peers/family members, all within the context of the local community. The intersections between settings with associated personnel can either deter or facilitate a youth's trajectory through the reentry process. We concentrated our analysis on the intersection of service sectors and youth to gain a
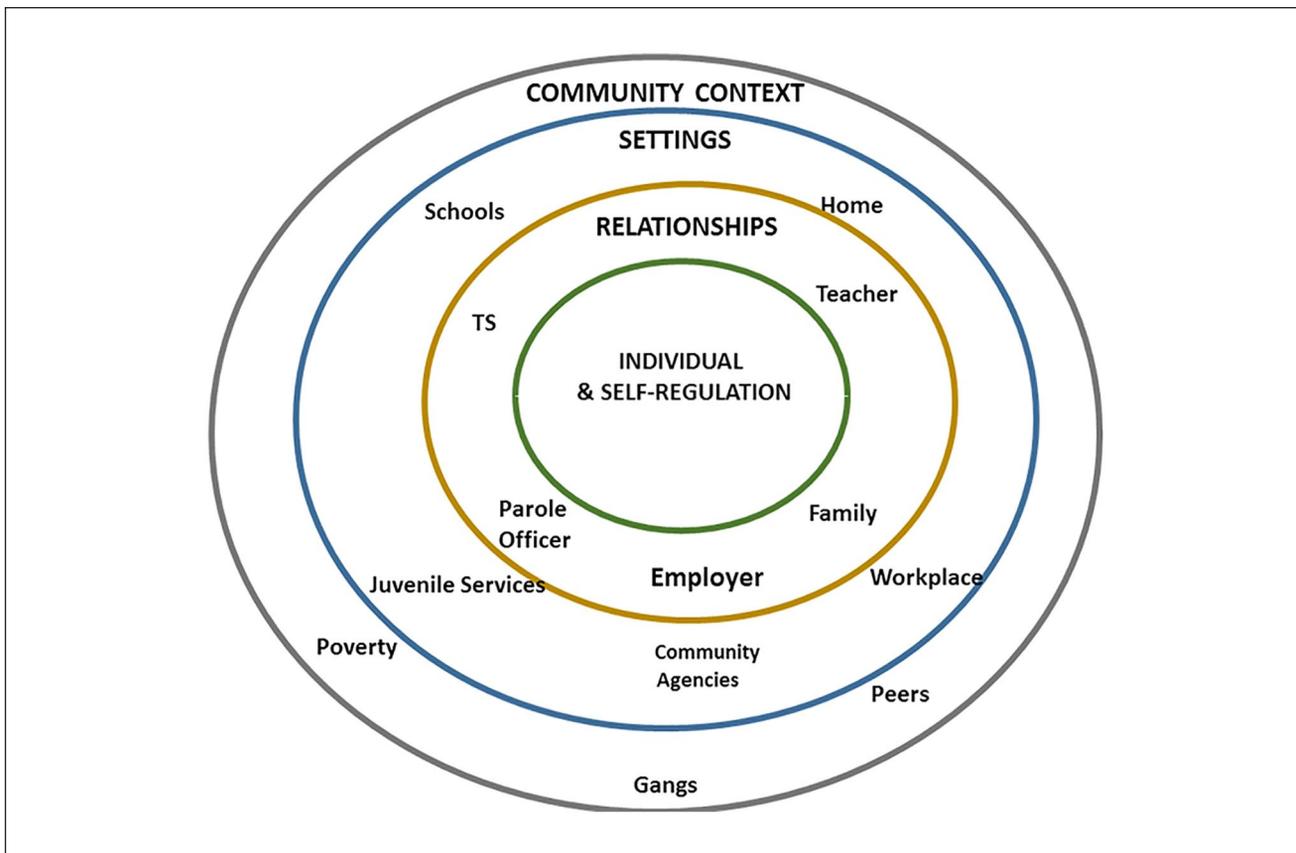
Figure 1. Ecological framework for young offender reentry.
Note. Adapted from Dishion and Patterson (2006). TS = transition specialist.

better understanding of the challenges, experiences, and successful support strategies between these spheres.

Setting

Three reentry programs utilizing Project STAY OUT (Strategies Teaching Young Offenders to Use Transition Skills) in the Northwest representing urban, suburban, and rural contexts participated in the study. These demonstration sites were purposefully selected to help understand how the contextual needs of providing reentry services to youth with disabilities vary across settings and whether barriers and challenges were consistent or varied across contexts. The urban site comprised a population of more than 2.3 million people. The racial composition was 72% White, 9.2% Hispanic, 6.3% African American, and 7.5% Asian. Almost 21% of residents fell below the poverty level, higher than the state average. The suburban demonstration site comprised about 166,000 people, with a racial composition of 81% White, 7.5% Hispanic, 1.6% African American, and 4.1% each of Asian and mixed; 29% of residents lived under the poverty level. The rural demonstration site was located in a small town with a population just less than

26,000. The majority of the population (57.4%) in the town were individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino. In addition, the area has a significant population representing the Russian Orthodox faith and 32% of residents live under the poverty level. All three sites were above the state average for number of residents living under the poverty level.

Project STAY OUT utilized a specific key school personnel (i.e., TS) identified to provide transition services for young offenders with IEPs returning to the school system to foster school engagement. The role of the TS included providing direct service through the provision of evidence-based practices to the young offender with a disability in their school district and, additionally, developing collaborative, working relationships and procedures for young offenders with disabilities returning to their communities. The TS worked closely with juvenile services, either county or state, located in their community. The role of this individual was critical to the intervention at a youth level and also key to engaging interagency collaborative partners in the reentry process for young offenders with disabilities.

Each program varied in placement of the TS; however, similar services were provided to the youth via collaborative services from juvenile services, school, workforce

(e.g., vocational rehabilitation), mental health professionals, and the family. In each of the three sites, the TS fulfilled a slightly different role. In the suburban site, the TS was housed in an office in the juvenile department and was in close contact with POs and therapists, often serving as an additional resource for other youth not on his caseload. The TS was very familiar with the four local high schools in the district as well as the alternative schools that were available to place students and worked with school personnel in each site to ensure the educational plan for each youth was individualized based on the youth's needs. In the other two sites, the TSs were housed in a local alternative school. The urban school served multiple districts in an urban setting that provided intervention services to gang-involved youth. This individual also served as the basketball coach and had additional duties within the school. The rural TS was housed in the district's sole alternative school and worked closely with the sole high school when youth transitioned from the alternative school to the main high school. The TS in each site represented the predominant ethnicity of youth served in each local program.

Participants

Participants for this study were purposively sampled from three broad stakeholder groups based on relationship and settings within the ecological model. This framework allowed us to identify stakeholders who, based on firsthand knowledge from interaction with youth in the project, could speak to the experiences, challenges, and facilitators for supports associated with program activities, as young offenders reentered school and the community. As our overall interest was in understanding supports for young offenders as they reengage in school, we focused on participants belonging to specific stakeholder groups with common characteristics and roles rather than individuals.

Within the three broad stakeholder groups, participants were purposively sampled based on roles within the various settings within youth reentry and specific inclusion/exclusion criteria (Patton, 2015). Primary stakeholders were youth released from a youth facility following incarceration. Youth were included in the study if they (a) were between the ages of 14 and 21, and (b) had an IEP in effect at the time of release. Youth were included regardless of the type of crime leading to adjudication. Youth who were adjudicated were excluded from the study if they had only received juvenile services in the community (e.g., never incarcerated) or who did not have an active IEP (e.g., did not have a disability or had a high school diploma and no longer had an IEP).

Secondary stakeholders consisted of personnel from the schools, juvenile services, and TSs, along with family members of the young offenders served in the project. Inclusion criteria for these participants were (a) firsthand

experience working with one or more adjudicated youth in the project, (b) frequent and direct interaction with released youth, or (c) were administrators within the schools and juvenile services. Tertiary, yet critical, stakeholders consisted of mental health providers and workforce professionals (e.g., vocational rehabilitation). Inclusion criteria for these participants consisted of (a) firsthand experience with adjudicated youth, and (b) infrequent or indirect interaction with youth in the project based on the youth's needs for community services. Individual participants representing the three broad stakeholder groups were then purposefully sampled during the 4 years of the project. When possible, individuals who represented a stakeholder group across multiple years (e.g., held the same position) were interviewed in subsequent years. Six individuals were interviewed twice and two individuals were interviewed 3 times. However, turnover (e.g., due to promotion, change in assignment, or vacating a job), prohibited conducting multiple interviews with some participants as individuals were purposely recruited based on their role in the project and not as individuals. We attempted to recruit more parents across each year, however, they were unable to gain participation (e.g., did not respond to phone recruitment or failed to show up for interview). Decisions regarding who to interview within a stakeholder group were made at the time interviews were to be conducted. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders who held specific roles in a youth's life, for example, vocational rehabilitation (VR), when a VR counselor was involved in the youth's transition.

In total, 54 interviews were conducted with 43 participants from three different stakeholder groups across the 4 years of the project. In keeping with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) description of triangulation, multiple data sources, that is, participant interviews, were used to corroborate the themes (Miles et al., 2020) and also provided the voice and agendas of stakeholder participants (Trainor & Graue, 2014). Furthermore, Hennink et al. (2017) recommended larger sample sizes to reach meaningful saturation across a complex phenomenon (e.g., community reentry) and with a heterogeneous sample (e.g., multiple diverse stakeholder groups). Table 1 summarizes the number of interviews by year and by stakeholder group.

Demographic data were collected on the youth participants and not on the stakeholder interview participants (e.g., POs and educators). Nine young offenders with disabilities were interviewed across the 4 years. The youth were 100% male, representing 44.4% Hispanic, 33.3% Caucasian, non-Hispanic, and 22.2% African American. The mean age of first adjudication was 14.9 years. The types of crime leading to adjudication for the youth interviewed included 55.5% property crime (e.g., theft and arson), 33.3% person-to-person (e.g., assault and rape), and 11.1% behavior (e.g., drug use).

Table 1. Summary of Interviews Across Years and Across Stakeholder Types.

Grant Year	Youth	Parent	PO	Education	TS	Workforce	Mental health	Total
Year 1	4	1	4	4	7	2	1	23
Year 2	2	1	4	4	1	1	2	15
Year 3	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	6
Year 4	1	0	3	4	1	0	1	10
Total	9	3	11	12	12	3	4	54

Note. PO = parole officer; TS = transition specialist.

Table 2. Example of Structured Interview Questions.

Year 1: Questions

1. Describe your current practices for supporting a young offender with disabilities in the IEP process and in the school setting.
2. What challenges do you encounter when a young offender reenters the school setting?
3. What school systems/structures are in place that currently support a young offender's reentry into the school setting?
4. What training/support/resources could support you to work more effectively with the young offenders returning to your school?

Years 2–4

1. How has your relationship with Project worked?
2. Describe what services your agency provided for project youth.
3. Were there any challenges for your agency to work with youth in the juvenile justice system (e.g., determining eligibility, length of services, and behaviors)?
4. What, if anything, could be improved?

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Program.

Data Collection

We obtained institutional review board for research on human subjects approval prior to the start of data collection; therefore, informed consent, and assent when the youth was below the age of 18, was provided prior to each interview. Youth and parent/caregivers were provided a US$25 gift card as an incentive for participation. Other personnel were interviewed as part of their normal positions in schools, juvenile services, or community agencies.

The second and fourth authors alternately conducted individual, in-depth interviews primarily in person; however, three of the interviews were conducted by phone based on the availability of the respondent. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 min. A structured interview format was used in which the interviewer asked broad questions aligned with the research questions and the ecological theoretical framework of this study. Interview questions were based on empirical literature and designed to explore the relationship dynamics and behavior settings of the theoretical framework. Table 2 provides a sample of the interview protocol used and it was adapted to the specific stakeholder being interviewed (e.g., PO or TS). If needed, probing questions aligned with the ecological framework were used to gain a deeper understanding of the topics the respondent discussed. Two interview protocols were used across the 4 years. In Year 1 of the project, the interview protocol was designed to capture the level of services provided to reentering youth at the start of the project across stakeholder groups. In Years 2 through 4, a second interview protocol consisted of questions to understand challenges and supports that were perceived to address a youth's reentry process. The interview questions were structured around the research questions and included questions about (a) barriers to serving young offenders returning to their schools and communities and (b) existing supports and services in place to support young offenders in their school and community. Field notes were used to record interviewers' notes, observations, and initial thoughts immediately following each interview (Emerson et al., 1995). Finally, all interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

We analyzed data following a multistage process (Bazeley, 2009; Miles et al., 2013). First, the transcribed interviews were read while listening to the audio files to ensure accuracy of transcription and correct any typos or misrepresented words (e.g., acronyms used were not transcribed correctly). The transcripts were first read by the research team to become familiar with them, then uploaded to qualitative data analyses (QDA; https://provalisresearch.com), a qualitative software program used for coding and analysis. QDA is a cross-platform application used to store and facilitate analysis of a wide variety of qualitative data; it does not analyze the data

Table 3. Intersection Within and Across Stakeholder Groups.

Stakeholder Group	Youth		TS		School		Juvenile services		Com. agencies		Family		Com. context	
	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−
Youth		X	X		X	X						X	X	X
TS	X				X		X		X	X	X	X		X
School	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X
Juvenile services		X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X		
Community agencies			X		X			X				X		X
Family	X		X		X									

Note. TS = transition specialist, Com. = community.

independent from the researcher. Second, we developed broad codes grounded in the literature and organized by the ecological model aligned with the research questions. Specifically, coded categories included (a) youth, (b) school, (c) juvenile services, (d) family, (e) peers, (f) TS services, (g) community service agencies, and (h) community context. Initial broad codes were developed that encompassed both positive (e.g., facilitators) and negative (e.g., challenges) for each coded attribute of the code categories, along with recommendations for service improvement, totaling 24 initial codes. Using these descriptive codes, we assigned codes to individual passages of text. The research team met frequently to review the coded data and discuss patterns, appropriateness of codes, and operational definitions of each code. Throughout the coding process, members of the research team captured their initial thoughts, impressions, and ideas in memos, recorded in QDA. Memos were shared, discussed, and used to inform coding definitions (e.g., providing examples or definition operators). This recursive review and discussion process enabled us to explore multiple perspectives during data interpretation. To ensure that interpretations were not idiosyncratic or biased, all coding was conducted in pairs. Rather than attempting to resolve coding differences, we reached initial agreement on the definition of each code. When applicable, multiple codes were assigned to each passage of text. This allowed for flexible, yet consistent data interpretation (Anfara et al., 2002). Once the code list stabilized, the second and fourth authors recoded all transcripts, in pairs, using the final code list (Miles et al., 2013).

In the third stage of analysis, we exported data segments coded under each code (also known as node reports) from QDA. The second and fourth authors read each node report and wrote a brief, descriptive synopsis for each specific code. Through the process of writing summary reports, themes within the codes were identified. Within the summary reports, verbatim quotes, or significant statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018), were extracted from the node report when they illustrated the code and/or specific intersection across the ecological categories in the authentic voice of the participant (Brantlinger et al., 2005). If multiple themes were derived from a code, each theme was described separately. After completing descriptive summaries, we compared and contrasted common and unique qualities and experiences across participants and settings. In the final stage of analysis, the lead author reviewed each code summary inclusive of quotes and the field notes for the interviews and organized summaries thematically by the intersection across ecological categories (e.g., intersection between the schools, juvenile services, and the youth; Braun & Clarke, 2006). To verify the prevalence of intersection between and across stakeholder groups, a matrix was built (see Table 3) using the code summary, identifying the intersections of stakeholder groups and whether the intersection was supportive or a useful reentry strategy or was a barrier or challenge to the reentry process. This allowed for a greater understanding of the intersection across stakeholder groups/setting.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used throughout data collection and analysis to meet the criteria associated with trustworthiness. Relative to credibility, these included using multiple sources of data (i.e., $N = 54$ interviews with 43 unique participants), as well as the "use of multiple investigators as part of a team" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 307), and engaging in peer debrief following interviews. Relative to dependability, we sought to "show meaningful parallelism across data sources" in the findings by explicitly demonstrating consistent and inconsistent themes within the intersections of the theoretical framework. Relative to dependability, the first author essentially served in the role of auditor, looking at both the process (e.g., used members of the research team to ensure consistency) and product (e.g., examining the summaries to ensure interpretations are supported by data). Finally, we used memoing to reflect on our assumptions, capture initial thoughts related to themes, and record first impressions for findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Results

In this section, we utilize our ecological model as the organizing framework of the findings. As expected in ecological

theoretical frameworks, the findings often intersect multiple spheres of influence and thus are not discrete spheres. Table 3 demonstrates when intersections were noted for a specific stakeholder group that was related to another stakeholder group—either through a barrier or challenge or was a contributing factor or strategy to support a positive reentry for young offenders. We summarized the barriers and opportunities from our analyses across four areas: (a) youth-centered challenges, (b) family involvement, (c) needs relative to interagency collaboration, and (d) the role of the TS. Representative quotes are used throughout to further illustrate the cross-stakeholder themes defined in the analyses. In general, a common overall theme across all stakeholders is that no one agency, entity, or individual can be the sole support needed for a successful reentry for a young offender back to their family, community, and school. This first quote emphasizes how the ecological framework supports the reentry process:

> Somebody explained to me juvenile justice as like a three-legged stool and that the three legs of the stool are: How are you doing in the community? How are you doing at home? and, How are you doing in school? And kids who are successful in the community and not using drugs, having positive peers; kids who are staying at home, obeying the rules at home, and getting along with their family; and kids that are going to school, they all do really well. If any of those legs doesn't stand, the stool falls over and the kid typically struggles. (Transition specialist)

Themes

Youth-centered challenges. The youth, school personnel, and juvenile services personnel all contributed information for challenges that a youth faces upon returning home to their community and family. The primary themes summarized by the stakeholders were barriers the youth would experience for a successful reentry due to academic deficits, the stigma of juvenile services involvement, and the lack of opportunity for typical adolescent development. Another barrier to a positive youth reentry, as reported by stakeholders, includes the risk factor of negative peer influence and additional stigma due to their known involvement in the juvenile justice system when returning to a school setting. Returning to the same community setting and peer groups in which the youth was originally detained contributes social pressures the youth find hard to navigate. As one youth shared, "Dropping my old friends—I think that had to be the toughest thing because they're close to me. It's hard but I managed to do it; so I think my life is getting better."

A juvenile services administrator elaborated on this theme:

> The youth that returns and has every intention of going to school, and is doing well, and has sobriety, and is back in the community and signed up for classes, gets on the bus and sees a friend that they used to use with or used to break the law with, and the friend says, "Hey, let's get off the bus and/or let's use, or let's whatever."

The stigma of being involved in the juvenile justice system is a barrier for young offenders when they return to their community and school. Many students have trouble getting to school consistently and have problems with credits and academic challenges, but, additionally, there is also the stigma of the rest of the students and staff knowing where the returning youth has been. A principal shared a youth's description for coming back to school: "my teachers all know I was in trouble and now they're looking at me differently."

Family involvement. The TSs, juvenile services, and the school all perceived the family as a critical component for a successful reentry process yet struggled with ways to increase family stability and positive engagement. Often, parents, mostly single heads of households, were working long hours at hourly paying jobs, so they had difficulty supervising youth. Some parents were described to experience substance abuse and or mental health issues, hence were unable to act as adult role models for their children. Some parents in the rural site were undocumented and were not native English speakers causing them to fear court or legal personnel and depend on their children to translate in the community. This often resulted in what appears to be a lack of involvement in their child's education. Families, at all three sites, experienced financial insecurity, resulting in unstable living conditions decreasing the ability to maintain positive school engagement. A PO noted,

> One of the barriers that we often see is kids and families struggling to have their basic needs met whether it be they don't have a consistent place to live, they're not getting eight hours of sleep at night for whatever reason, they're sleeping in a car, or their food situation, you know, they go to school without food in the morning, and just kind of basic needs-types things.

School personnel also indicated the importance of family involvement in the school setting, but noted that "life circumstances" may impede a parent's involvement in their youth's education and the importance of building strong relationships with the parent. A school vice principal elaborated,

> The parents are really in challenging situations themselves and what I think, there's a misperception that a lot of the parents aren't involved or don't care . . . . they do care quite a bit, but they frequently have so many other things going on their plate and on their table, that that phone call, that conference, pales in comparison to the issues that they're struggling with in that moment; . . . .

At one of the sites, youth were older and some became parents themselves. The youth then found themselves with the added responsibilities of being parents and not necessarily having a parental role model to draw upon along with trying to complete their education and financially support their new family. The TS identified the need for further training on how to become more engaged with families and how to get families to understand how to become more engaged with their child. Stakeholders shared that it took a lot of coaching with parents to help them to understand how to access resources at school and in the community. Juvenile services personnel reported it as a critical intersection where the TS was really helpful in getting families to advocate for their own needs. A TS described using every mode of communication—"texting, calling, emailing"—to keep parents apprised of their child's activities. This TS would additionally make himself available to families when they had court appearances or counseling sessions so he could provide them support or just check in before or after these events. The TS provided referrals to identified community resources. Juvenile services shared how the TS position supported families in this endeavor:

> The TS gets them in the door and helps them get those resources accessed. And then it's about sustainability and TS kind of handing off the reins in teaching them and showing them, [these are] how you get these things so that they can sustain after he's gone or if they go somewhere else.

Juvenile services, in addition, recognized the importance of the TS's help in getting families to support the youth's engagement into the school system by navigating school enrollment and supporting access to resources that supported family stabilization. A PO outlined,

> The TS helps us [juvenile services] in a lot, in well, a lot of different ways. One is getting youth and families plugged back into school so sometimes . . ., they don't even know who to call or where to start or how do they get their kid re-enrolled in school. . . . So [TS] is really helpful in that he is the hub of the school piece and so all families really need to do is get in touch with [TS].

Interagency collaboration challenges. Themes defined in the intersection of juvenile services, the school, and the youth reentry process included several barriers, yet multiple strategies for collaboration emerged to support the reentry process.

All three sites described the difficulties districts have in responding to students and the school's policies. Parole and probation officers do not understand the school system when it comes to the requirements of an IEP. On the contrary, schools do not understand how juvenile services operate and what services the youth may be receiving in the community. As one PO described,

> A lot of our kids are on IEPs so when we went to the District meetings, we kind of were at their beck and call or their beck and whatever they decided to do. We really weren't there to advocate for the kids because it's not knowing the school systems inside and out.

Conversely, POs shared that some school personnel may have misconceptions of the role of juvenile services and what POs may or may not do. One example shared was that a PO had heard a teacher say, "You don't turn in your homework or you fall asleep in class, I'm going to call your PO and they're going to come and lock you up."

Across all three sites, both juvenile services and school personnel identified it would be useful to gain more knowledge about how the other "system" actually operates and the parameters of services provided to the youth. As one PO described his need for additional training, ". . . then maybe just some stuff on IEPs and educational disabilities and understanding what those mean and the types of services that would meet the needs of those in particular."

Collectively, school personnel, juvenile services, and other stakeholders identified it was important for strong collaboration with juvenile services and the school, specifically for youth with disabilities. One mechanism to ensure that an IEP is developed around the strengths and needs of the youth is ensuring all partners are at the table for the IEP meeting. As one TS described an IEP meeting, "It's the team, so it's me, the SPED teacher, it's the counselor, the school psychologist, the assistant principal, the kid, the parents, the PO, and we're all sitting there." A principal shared the importance of juvenile services being at the table during the IEP meeting, "Understanding what their [the youth] commitments are and weaving those into the IEP so that it makes sense, it's practical, and it's strength-based for that student."

Importance of the TS's role. The TS role was identified by each ecological sphere of influence as a critical person who supports a young offender's successful trajectory returning home, to school, and the community. In all three sites, the TS was employed by the school and was included in the school's intersection of influence; however, this role emerged so strongly across all interviews that the role warrants separate reporting of results.

The role of the TS was reported to help reduce the silo between each of the service agencies, specifically between the school and juvenile services. Stakeholders reported that having the TS in the schools, hearing what administrators were saying, and knowing what is going on with the student's needs, makes the job of the juvenile department, therapists, and POs much easier. The TS became a conduit

for supporting the youth's engagement in school and communicating to other stakeholders how the youth was doing or whether another stakeholder (e.g., PO or counselor) needed to intervene.

Building the relationship between the TS and juvenile services occurred across time. POs shared that that the TS really enhanced the communication between juvenile services and schools. One TS shared,

> So, I think they appreciate the fact that I am going out to schools and checking in with kids. There are a lot of kids that an expectation is for them to call their probation officer once a week; so, during a time that I am there checking in with them to use my [school district] phone to say, "Hey let's call your probation officer, okay?" So, it's a nice partnership.

The TS role also helped break down the silos and lack of knowledge of the school system. As described earlier, schools and juvenile services reported benefiting from learning more about each other's systems. The TS in these sites became the conduit for easing the knowledge barrier and supporting collaboration across agencies. One juvenile department therapist noted,

> I want to help this kid and he goes to a public high school, but that means if I call the high school I don't even know who I really need to talk to like . . . . a school counselor?; and I have to figure out what releases exactly I need. But once I found out that there was one person [the TS] that could probably know that information ahead of time for me or help me, . . . that's always a lot easier.

The TS role not only served to support communication between the school and juvenile services, but also as a resource for the youth to enroll in school and maintain school engagement. Juvenile services relied on the TS to support the immediate reenrollment needed for youth returning home and bridging services between schools, juvenile services, and community agencies. A PO described,

> [TS]'s been working with these kids forever and ever. So, they kind of know how our [juvenile services] work, they know how the school system works and so they help make a bridge to that gap; so that we're not coming in cold and that we're not just trying to reinvent the wheel every time.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to further understand from stakeholder perspectives of both barriers for developing, and strategies to foster, interagency collaboration in the reentry process for young offenders to increase school engagement and reduce recidivism. Miller et al. (2019), in a recent literature synthesis on reentry practices for adjudicated youth with disabilities, provided three recommendations based on

their synthesis: (a) use of a TS, (b) foci on employment and educational engagement, and (c) the need for mental health services. This study confirmed these recommendations by identifying the critical role of a TS in supporting youth to participate in prosocial activities and maintain engagement in school and or employment settings. The TS also facilitated the access to mental health services based on the individualized needs of each youth.

Our findings based in an ecological model demonstrate the intersection between the young offenders with disabilities, the family, the school, and juvenile services, providing strategies, both already empirically validated or additional ones, that schools and juvenile services can implement. In this study, the TS was employed by the local school system. Juvenile services providers in each site reported how the TS role with schools ensured that the youth were reenrolled in school and supported their educational engagement. Juvenile services also reported the usefulness of the TS in working with families and providing guidance for getting the youth enrolled back in school. The TS's relationship with other school personnel also was supportive for the individualized needs of the youth and, specifically, in terms of intervening between the school, family, and juvenile services if additional supports were needed based on the youth's behavior.

Findings from this study, specific to interagency collaboration, validated the results and recommendations from other studies (e.g., Johnson et al., 2017; Mathur et al., 2017; Unruh et al., 2009; Waintrup & Unruh, 2008) and provided insights for how personnel in the field perceive the need for procedures that enhance interagency collaboration for a young offender's reentry to home, school, and the community. One critical feature identified is for school personnel to identify and implement systematic mechanisms to increase collaborations across each ecological sphere (e.g., youth, juvenile services, families, and other community agencies). By establishing systematic communication procedures (e.g., referral procedures and case updates) and collaborative processes (e.g., family support and transfer of records), a multipronged reentry process can be established that can positively support a young offender with disabilities during their reentry process.

Finally, through the use of qualitative methods, the study provides a clear description of the processes, barriers, and opportunities for supporting young offenders with disabilities in their reentry process (Brantlinger et al., 2005). By using this method, we were able to gain perspectives across the multiple stakeholder groups essential to the reentry process, lending further transparency to the reentry needs of adjudicated youth.

Limitations

When interpreting results of this study, there are several limitations we want to acknowledge. First, qualitative

studies by design are nonexperimental and, therefore, no causality can be established. Second, the sample was based on participants in a reentry intervention across three locales (urban, suburban, and rural) in a state in the Northwest. A larger sample of parents and more diverse sample of youth, specifically including young women, is needed to confirm, or disconfirm, the patterns and trends identified in this study. We also did not collect demographic data on the stakeholders representing the school, TSs, juvenile services, and other community partners. The stakeholders were representative of individuals holding those positions who interacted with youth in the project. Finally, we utilized a variety of strategies to reduce the bias of the data collectors and coders in this study, including using multiple coders, and reaching agreement on definitions and descriptions of codes. Nevertheless, it is probable that different researchers would identify different themes and patterns. Despite these limitations, our findings provide important new insights into how interagency collaborations support the reentry process for young offenders with disabilities returning to their families, schools, and communities.

Implications for Research

Primary themes that can benefit from more in-depth and purposeful research include exploring interventions for increasing family involvement and the efficacy of the TS role in the reentry process. Each stakeholder group defined the importance of family involvement as a critical role to support a youth's engagement in school and future reentry success. However, all groups acknowledged barriers for family participation. Many of the barriers identified speak to risk factors related to economic insecurity and/or adults also needing to address drug use, mental health concerns, and housing stability. Two evidence-based interventions focused on families identified for reducing offending by juveniles include multisystemic family therapy (MST; Henggeler et al., 1998) and Family Check-Up (Dishion et al., 2003). Exploration is needed to understand the components of these interventions that can be incorporated into a school-based reentry program such as Project STAY OUT.

Through examination of the role of the TS, Davis and colleagues (2018) identified preliminary data that support the use of a vocational coach as an added component to MST. This vocational coach provided a set of activities with the youth that are a subset of some of the activities the TS provides as a direct service to the young offenders in Project STAY OUT. Further examination of how the MST is adapted to a school environment tests how the role of the TS can support the implementation of the intervention—much similar to the role of the vocational coach.

In general, as noted in Miller and colleagues (2019), the field has limited rigorous quantitative investigations

such as correlational to the gold standard of experimental research. Now that the field has identified key components for successful reentry programs for adjudicated youth with disabilities (e.g., TS and interagency collaboration), it is time to test these components using quantitative methods to better understand which components influence positive outcomes of school completion, employment, and community engagements. For example, more research is needed to empirically test the factors of interagency collaboration, for example, examining how modes of communication are developed and exploring the key components of a reentry program across agencies that are essential for improving reentry outcomes for young offenders with disabilities. That said, as interagency collaboration is difficult to measure, measuring the fidelity of implementation to further understand how best to install an intervention at the least cost (e.g., professional development and coaching), and sustained across time, is needed. Another avenue to empirically explore is whether there are malleable individual characteristics of youth (e.g., self-regulation) that demonstrate better outcomes for young offenders than others.

Implications for Practice

First, the role of the TS was again validated as critical to each stakeholder group. In this study, the TS was employed by the local school districts. Strategies need to be identified to identify an individual in a school setting solely responsible for building relationships with the family, juvenile services, and community agencies, in addition to providing direct special education transition services relative to school engagement, career and employment planning, and skills to improve family and community living.

Second, this study's findings validated the importance of breaking down the silos between various agencies to learn about each entity. For example, school personnel (e.g., counselors, registrars, vice principals, and general and special education teachers) needed to know about the types of services youth involved in juvenile services receive and school expectations relative to the young offender's parole plan. In addition, juvenile services personnel identified the need to understand more about special education services and how best to support the development and implementation of the IEP process, and, for example, identify how the parole plan requisites help inform the IEP development and implementation.

Third, as juvenile services is not a federal system and varies across states, even counties and municipalities, it is important for school personnel to identify local juvenile service procedures to develop the collaborative relationships to support school engagement of young offenders returning to local schools. Due to the variance of juvenile services by each locality, it may be useful to develop a set

of professional development modules to help school personnel define and develop in-school procedures to enhance the relationship building between juvenile services, the family, and needed community agencies to serve young offenders returning to their community. These modules could help school personnel to define how juvenile services are administered in their locale, develop efficient referral procedures, and define clear communication processes to support school engagement for young offenders enrolled in their school system.

Conclusion

Young offenders with disabilities need additional support for successful reentry to their home, school, and community. The findings from this study provide further validation for the critical need for interagency collaboration across families, schools, juvenile services, and other community agencies to ensure a positive reentry process for young offenders with disabilities. The first step for building cross-agency collaborative procedures is to understand and map the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of each agency, so that each is clear who is responsible for specific services to ensure there are not gaps nor duplications in service. Second, the findings point directly to the strength of the role of a TS, employed by the school district, to be a bridge builder across agencies serving as a conduit for building collaborative procedures across schools, juvenile services, and the family for these young offenders with disabilities.

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