

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/building-on-family-strengths-for-better-outcomes>

Campaign and Advocacy

Publication

Juvenile justice agencies are increasingly aware of the benefits to partnering with families whose youth are in their care and custody. The research, albeit limited, is conclusive: youth who have more family support are more likely to succeed. In 2015, the Sedgwick County, Kansas Division of Corrections (DOC) turned their attention to family partnership as a way to continue their achievements in reductions with placement, and to achieve better outcomes for the youth touched by the system. Through an 18-month partnership with the Vera Institute of Justice, the DOC implemented an intensive family engagement initiative driven by staff and centered by the voices of youth and their families. This report provides an overview of these family engagement plans and offers an assessment of the efforts based on 2017 data.

Most juvenile corrections approaches focus on deficits and typically view youth and families as problems, rather than a source for solutions. Shifting this culture to a strengths-based and family-focused approach is a significant effort that requires changes in policy, procedure, practice, and staff training at each program.

The practice changes designed to better engage youth with their parent(s) and families positively impacted all juvenile clients served across the continuum of DOC services.

The biggest changes implemented by DOC involved expanding visitation privileges. Facilities now allow extended and expanded family visitation for people like siblings, aunts, uncles, and other supportive community members.

A huge change for the DOC in their effort to engage more families was creating more welcoming environments. All of the DOC juvenile facilities expanded the number of visitation days each week and extended the amount of time per visits.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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