**Act 185 Study Committee**

**Topic Areas for Reflection/Recommendation Generation**

*Descriptions below summarize information from the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform’s Youth In Custody Practice Model guide, shared with members at the Committee’s initial meeting, and from the Council of State Governments Justice Center.*

**Topic Area 1: Education and Employment**

**Description**  According to a recent survey, at least one in three incarcerated youth has been identified as needing or already receiving special education services; more than half have reading and math skills significantly below their grade level and have repeated a grade; and most had been suspended or expelled from school before becoming incarcerated. Many youth come to the youth justice system from under-performing schools that offer few opportunities for positive educational and vocational engagement. School performance is a key risk/protective factor that, if addressed appropriately, may reduce a youth’s risk of reoffending. Dependable access to high-quality education programs as well as pre-vocational and vocational opportunities relevant to their interests and that correspond with opportunities in their communities are essential for youth to make progress toward educational and career readiness upon release.

**Guiding questions:**

* What are the goals for youth in this area?

(*e.g., all youth leave a SRCC with some work-based learning experience; all youth have access to the same types of educational and vocational services available to youth in the community, such as the opportunity to earn school credits toward a high school diploma*)

* What programs/services are needed?

(*e.g., a designated staff person should be responsible for ensuring that all school credits earned at an SRCC are transferred to the student’s home school*)

* What supports need to be in place for programs/services to be implemented and effective?

(*e.g., dedicated trauma-informed school space; electronic access to school records; access to jobs in facility and/or community*)

**Topic Area 2: Rehabilitative/Treatment Services**

**Description:** Rehabilitative and treatment services target specific needs identified through the assessment process, and include services that address criminogenic risks and needs, such as cognitive behavioral programming and substance use disorder treatment, as well as behavioral health services. With regards to behavioral health needs, studies suggest 60% or more of youth in custody have a mental illness, and roughly four out of every five youth have experienced trauma. A significant percentage also suffer from co-occurring disorders (i.e., both a substance use and mental health disorder). Critical elements of a comprehensive approach to rehabilitative/treatment services include screening, assessment, planning, and service delivery.

**Guiding questions:**

* What are the goals for youth in this area?

(*e.g., treatment programs are provided to meet youth’s assessed criminogenic needs; all youth have their mental health needs assessed and are provided necessary services to meet those needs*)

* What programs/services are needed?

(*e.g., mental health therapist on site; evidence-based programs; cognitive behavioral programming; substance use disorder treatment; sex offender treatment*)

* What supports need to be in place for programs/services to be implemented and effective?

(*e.g., dedicated space for mental health treatment that is trauma-informed; policies in place that allow access to needed services 24/7*)

**Topic Area 3: Developmental/Recreational Programming**

**Description:** While youth come to the justice system with a wide range of complicated needs, they are also, at their core, adolescents who must navigate developmental tasks just like any other youth. Facility programming that includes recreational activities and programs that target specific developmental needs ensure youth leave the facility better prepared to transition to adulthood. Under the model of positive youth development, an array of programs and activities that provide opportunities for Learning/Doing and Attaching/Belonging can accomplish this, as well as recreational programs, including large muscle activity, structured recreational activities and unstructured free time.

**Guiding questions:**

* What are the goals for youth in this area?

(*e.g., all youth have a range of programming similar to what they would have access to in a high school environment, including athletics, art, music, STEM activities, etc.*)

* What programs/services are needed?

(*e.g., regular music and art programs*)

* What supports need to be in place for programs/services to be implemented and effective?

(*e.g., dedicated space for programming; indoor and outdoor recreation space; policies in place to incentivize participation*)

**Topic Area 4: Family and Community Engagement**

**Description:** To achieve positive youth outcomes, families and communities must be meaningfully involved in the rehabilitation and treatment process for youth in custody. Loved ones and other supportive adults play important roles in reinforcing pro-social behavior and serving as role models. Meaningful family participation in decision making and treatment, regular information sharing, and support of connections between family and youth must occur throughout the youth’s time in care, and may intensify closer to release.

**Guiding questions:**

* What are the goals for youth in this area?

(*e.g., all youth maintain and strengthen family connections while in SRCCs; all youth are engaged with supportive adults in their community, whether family or not*)

* What programs/services are needed?

(*e.g., a family visitation coordinator, family therapy available on-site, outreach and services to families outside of the facility*)

* What supports need to be in place for programs/services to be implemented and effective?

(*e.g., a designated space for family visits to occur; video conferencing capabilities)*