

A Model Assessment Tool for a Comprehensive Youth Reentry and Reintegration
Strategy: A Case Study of the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's
SOAR Reentry Court Program

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About the Author



Denise Upshaw is a Summer 2021 graduate of Texas State University's Master of Public Administration program. Denise has served the public interest for more than 19 years in diverse cities across the nation, including Sacramento, New York City, and Austin. Her passion centers on policy reform in the adult and juvenile justice systems, as these systems disproportionately impact people of color. In her current professional capacity, Denise supports a division of juvenile justice professionals at the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department. Denise's long-term career goals include serving in an executive leadership position at an organization committed to reimagining the American justice system, educating students pursuing a career in the Criminal Justice field, and serving on the board of a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding opportunities for justice-involved youth.

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My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style. - Maya Angelou

Executive Summary

This research seeks to maximize the effectiveness and outcomes of juvenile reentry and reintegration, by compiling components that comprise an ideal model for a juvenile reentry and reintegration strategy serving the target population. The preliminary model was developed using scholarly and practical literature that revealed four components: Parent Engagement and Support, Case Management, Youth Motivation, and Accountability Measures. Upon developing the juvenile reentry and reintegration model, the researcher conducted administrator interviews and court observations to compare the model's components against the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's reentry court program known as "Strengthening Opportunities for Achieving Reentry" (SOAR).

In essence, most of SOAR's components aligned with the preliminary model. The program offers a very comprehensive menu of services and resources. However, strengthening subcomponents under Parent Engagement and Support and Accountability Measures would ensure SOAR's foundational elements are wholly rooted in the literature. Further, the study illuminated SOAR's unique strengths, including judicial involvement, youth incentives, dedication to fairness and positive youth development, and access to nonprofit organization support.

Consequently, Nonprofit Organization Support emerged as a new component recommended for a comprehensive juvenile reentry and reintegration strategy. This new component is critical to reentry success due to its function in building community networks, supporting basic needs, and funding the incentive matrix. The nonprofit's support is necessary for three of the four components (Parent Engagement and Support, Case Management, and Youth Motivation) to be successful. Nonprofit Organization Support has not been widely explored in juvenile reentry literature, and yet considerably contributes to SOAR's success.

Lastly, the researcher generated a set of practical policy recommendations to strengthen alignment between SOAR and the literature, as outline below:

1. Formalize Peer Partner Support
2. Increase Structured Opportunities for Parent Involvement Throughout Treatment
3. Translate Standardized Interventions into Youth-Friendly Language
4. Assess SOAR Policies and Practices to Uncover Any Implicit Bias That May Exist
5. Strengthen Restorative Justice Approaches
6. Conduct Frequent Program Evaluations

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Abstract

This research focuses on maximizing the effectiveness and outcomes of juvenile reentry and reintegration, by compiling components that comprise an ideal model for a juvenile reentry and reintegration strategy serving the target population. First, a preliminary model was developed using scholarly and practical literature that revealed four components: parent engagement and support, case management, youth motivation, and accountability measures. Next, a case study was conducted on the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's "Strengthening Opportunities for Achieving Reentry" (SOAR) Reentry Court program – comparing SOAR's program components against the literature's ideal type components. SOAR's program administrators gave input via focused interviews about the structure and makeup of their program. Additionally, direct observations were conducted of SOAR court hearings to witness the use of these strategies. Next, the data gathered concluded that SOAR's components mostly aligned with the preliminary model. However, with strengthening subcomponents under parent engagement and support and accountability measures, SOAR would be fully aligned with the literature. Furthermore, a new component emerged: Nonprofit Organization Support. Juvenile justice agencies can refer to this model when creating or enhancing juvenile reentry strategies for youth experiencing the juvenile justice system. Finally, a recommendation was made for SOAR administrators to strengthen the accountability measures component because it lacked significant evidence.

Keywords: juvenile justice, juvenile reentry court, youth motivation, youth accountability, positive youth development, model program

Chapter I: Introduction

Figure 1.1 Juvenile Justice (Photo Credit: Richard Ross/The Imprint)



Introduction

Leviticus Mitchell is a 25-year-old African American man born and raised in Bronx, New York. Mitchell was just 14 years old when he gave a false confession for a gun charge and received a six-year sentence (Norwood News, 2017). Mitchell's experience with New York City's correctional system spanned the length of his adolescence until his discharge at 19 years of age. During a 2017 interview, Mitchell revealed that being incarcerated made him feel degraded, dehumanized, and stagnated in his preparation for adulthood. Not only was Mitchell unfamiliar with banking tools, but he also lacked the skills to apply for a state identification card, enroll himself in school, and apply for a job (Morgan, 2017). Furthermore, due to his parents' absence from his life, he was in critical need of positive, supportive adults to guide him through his community reintegration.

While all of these factors increased Mitchell's risk for recidivism, he revealed, "Deep down inside of me I knew I wanted to do better, I just didn't know where to go or how to go about it (Fox5NY, 2017)." Leviticus Mitchell represents many young men and women returning to the community from incarceration who desire to achieve their goals and need structure, guidance, and resources to be successful. Unfortunately, juvenile justice agencies across the country, including agencies in Texas, have grappled with developing effective reentry approaches, leaving many youth feeling lost, afraid, and hopeless upon reaching the facility's exit doors.

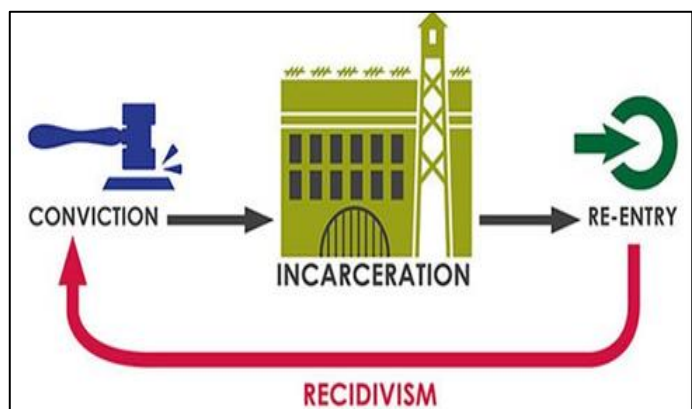
Background

In 2016, more than 45,000 youth were confined nationwide (OJJDP, 2019). While youth confinement rates have declined considerably over the last ten years, the development of comprehensive approaches for reducing recidivism remains challenging for most agencies. Unfortunately, national youth recidivism data does not exist, but states have shown that an average of 55 percent of youth are rearrested within one year of discharge (Snyder & Sickmund 2006). Comparatively, in FY16, Texas Juvenile Justice Department reported a 33.5 percent recidivism rate within one year of discharge (Corpus-Ybarra, 2018). In addition, statistics published across the country suggest that

more than half of youth are rearrested or reincarcerated within two years of being discharged from placement (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2017). Individual treatment programs certainly help curtail behaviors that lead to

reoffending; however, it is the lack of a comprehensive system that leads to extensive recidivism.

Figure 1.2 Recidivism and Justice (Photo Credit: MicheaB/ Medium)



Defining Juvenile/Youth

The term *juvenile* commonly refers to a criminal offender who has not reached their eighteenth birthday (U.S. Department of Justice), though definitions vary from state to state. Mirroring the federal penal system, California broadly defines juveniles as an offender under eighteen years old (California Judicial Branch). However, Texas narrows its definition to a youth at least ten years old but not yet seventeen when committing an offense (Texas Juvenile Justice Department). New York further narrows its juvenile definition to a child between the ages of seven and fifteen. Finally, New York lawmakers define an adolescent offender as a youth between sixteen and seventeen years old (www.nycourts.gov). In the context of this research, "juvenile" and "youth" (used interchangeably) refer to offenders under the age of eighteen.

Defining Reentry

Juvenile reentry is a broad term used when referring to youth transitioning from secure placement to community supervision. The terms "reentry," "aftercare," and "relapse prevention" often refer to what happens when youth return to the community (Altschuler & Armstrong, 2002). Most justice professionals assert that the reentry process begins the first day of confinement and ends with youths' successful reintegration into their homes and communities (OJJDP, 2018). The phrase "successful reintegration" has traditionally been denoted by an absence of criminal behavior (recidivism) during a designated period that can range from three months to five years. However, modern research acknowledges that a low recidivism rate is not the sole indicator of successful reentry and reintegration. Evidence presented in this paper highlights the notion that improvements in prosocial behavior and increases in positive youth development (protective factors) are also promising signs that youth successfully reintegrate back into the community (Butts et al., 2010). Overall, the long-term goal for implementing a

comprehensive reentry and reintegration strategy is to reduce recidivism, promote stable families and communities, increase public safety, and increase positive youth outcomes (Second Chance Act, 2007).

Defining Recidivism

Recidivism refers to “repeated or habitual relapse, as into crime; the chronic tendency toward repetition of criminal or antisocial behavior patterns” (Dictionary.com). Recidivism criteria differ across jurisdictions. For example, a new adjudication or conviction may represent a recidivating event in one jurisdiction, while in another, justice officials are focused on new referrals and arrests (Corpus-Ybarra, 2018). The lack of a consistent definition can skew data collection, analysis, and reporting efforts. Further, the recidivism rate is used to inform how well interventions have worked before, during, and after the reentry process (Corpus-Ybarra, 2018). To calculate the recidivism rate, analysts divide the number of youth in a cohort by the number of youth who recidivate during a specific period (usually up to 5 years post-charge) and multiply the number by 100. The resulting number is a percentage known as the recidivism rate (Peters, 2011). Juvenile justice professionals strive to enhance their ability to predict recidivism probability by administering various risk and need assessment tools, as evidenced in the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework.

Risk-Need-Responsivity Principle

Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) is a model used in criminology to develop recommendations for how youth should be supported based on the risk they present, what they need, and be responsive to their unique circumstances and environments in order to reduce recidivism. RNR is widely accepted in the juvenile justice industry as one of the leading models for guiding juvenile assessment and treatment (Taxman & Smith, 2020). The Risk Principle

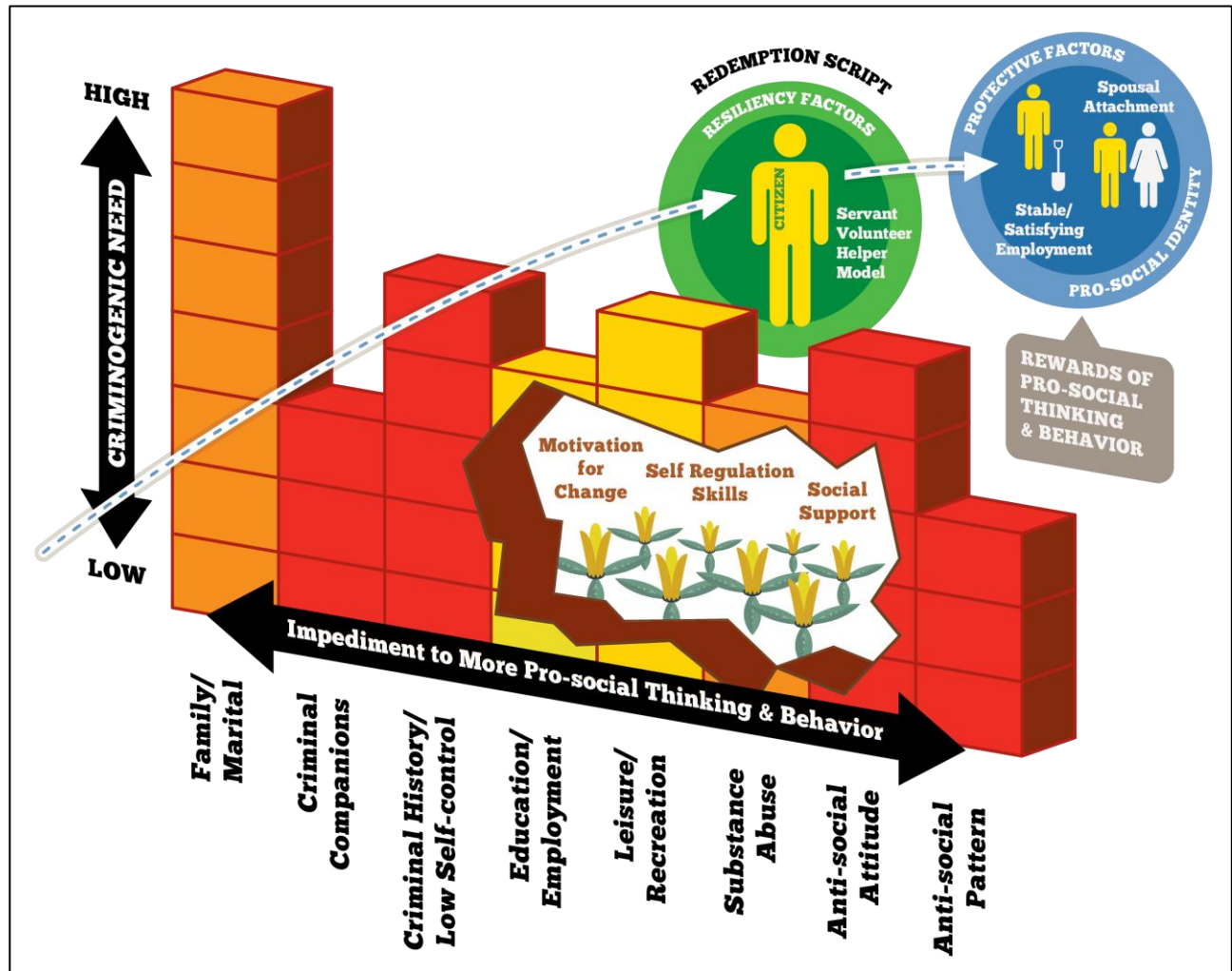
concentrates on matching the program intensity to the identified risk level. Thus, practitioners provide an intensive level of intervention for higher-risk youth and minimal treatment for those youth considered lower-risk. The Need Principle emphasizes targeting “actuarial-based risk factors” and dynamic risk factors (commonly referred to as criminogenic needs), or those needs that are associated with justice involvement (Andrews et al., 2011). As outlined in Figure 1.3, the impediments to more social thinking and behaviors include family factors, antisocial peers, antisocial personality, substance use, antisocial values, education and employment deficits, and leisure/recreation activities deficits. Finally, the Responsivity Principle centers on individual-level factors (Andrews et al., 2004). Responsivity factors include mental health status, race, religion, gender, motivation, literacy, and housing stability. RNR transformed the juvenile justice field by renewing the importance of programming and treatment to modify behavior (Taxman & Smith, 2020).

Treatment

Rehabilitation, or treatment, commences upon youths’ admission into secure or non-secure confinement. While confinement has historically served as a mechanism for accountability and deterrence (MacKenzie, 1997), it further serves as an opportunity to administer treatment modalities that address dynamic risk factors and coordinate enrichment programming to increase protective factors. Accordingly, practitioners emphasize appropriate treatment during confinement and intensive efforts to reinforce and advance treatment after transitioning into the community. Research points to various treatment interventions showing relative promise in reducing recidivism, including providing interpersonal skill training, cognitive-behavioral approaches, and multimodal approaches (Frederick, 1999). Further, the potential for sustainable reductions in recidivism exists if residential programs are adequately matched with community-based programs that continue to build upon youth interests and

competencies (Altschuler, Armstrong and MacKenzie, 1999), all of which should be integrated into the treatment and transition planning.

Figure 1.3 Wall of Recidivism (Photo Credit: J-SAT)



Existing Research

A large body of individual research exists on youth reentry models (OJJDP, 2014; OJJDP, 2018; OJJDP, 2019), case management (Butts et al., 2010; The Task Force on Employment and Training for Court-Involved Youth, 2000), youth motivational tools (Harvell et al., 2018), (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2017), and accountability measures (Bogue et al., 2004). Nevertheless, there lacks a comprehensive approach

encompassing all elements into one practical model. This research sets out to fill the gap that is not satisfied by current research.

This research draws heavily upon the United States Department of Justice's 2004 publication "Implementing Evidence-Based Practice in Community Corrections: The Principles of Effective Intervention," which offers best practices in juvenile justice intervention. The authors posit that treatment programs should reflect the components of RNR to maximize positive outcomes with youth (Bogue et al., 2004). The eight principles reflected in the model include: "assess actuarial risk/needs, enhance intrinsic motivation, target interventions, skill train with directed practice, increase positive reinforcement, engage ongoing support in natural communities, measure relevant processes/practices, and provide measurement feedback." (Bogue et al., 2004). Unfortunately, though the model provides a comprehensive approach to offender rehabilitation, it lacks the foundational elements of youth development and engagement.

Research Purpose

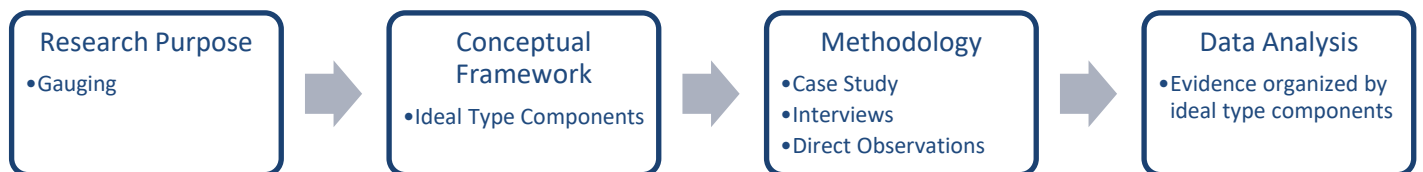
The objective of this applied research project is threefold: 1) to follow a gauging approach and consult the literature to describe the categories of a comprehensive youth reentry and reintegration strategy that is rooted in practical and empirical research; 2) to conduct a case study to examine the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's "Strengthening Opportunities for Achieving Reentry" (SOAR) Reentry Court program – comparing SOAR's program components against the literature's components; and 3) to provide practical recommendations that can strengthen the alignment between SOAR's program components and the literature's components – essentially improving youths' reentry and reintegration outcomes.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the practical ideal components of a comprehensive youth reentry (aftercare) strategy as reflected in the literature. This chapter presents a thorough literature review that helps identify the categories of best practices proven effective in producing the most desirable outcomes for such programs. This chapter ends with the presentation of the practical conceptual framework. The elements within this framework direct the search for evidence so that the evidence collected will either support or fail to support the implicit normative expectation – see Figure 2.1 (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013). The four practical categories resulting from this research include Parent Engagement and Support, Case Management, Youth Motivational Tools, and Accountability Measures. Each component has normative criteria, or subcomponents. Together, these components form the framework used to describe a comprehensive youth reentry strategy's practical categories.

Figure 2.1 Research Process for the Gauging/Practical Ideal Type Pairing (Image Credit: Shields & Rangarajan, 2013)



Parent Engagement and Support serves as a practical ideal type category for a comprehensive youth reentry strategy because of the essential role parents play in youth's lives as they enter and depart from the juvenile justice system. Andrew and Bonta (2006) identified the family as one of seven dynamic risk factors, or criminogenic needs, that can lead to and perpetuate criminal activity. Family functionality, cohesion, and stability substantially impact youth's social trajectory, including their propensity to experience the juvenile justice system and the likelihood of transitioning out of it (Fergeus et al., 2017). In addition, the literature suggests that supporting parents with basic needs, engaging parents in family-centered therapeutic services, encouraging parents' attendance at court, and including parents in transition planning can lead to a reduction in their youth's dynamic risk factors. Furthermore, this support can significantly increase youths' protective factors – often reducing the risk to re-offend. Furthermore, the literature asserts that parents are better equipped to support their justice-involved youth when receiving peer partner support (Walker et al., 2015).

1.1 Peer Partner Support

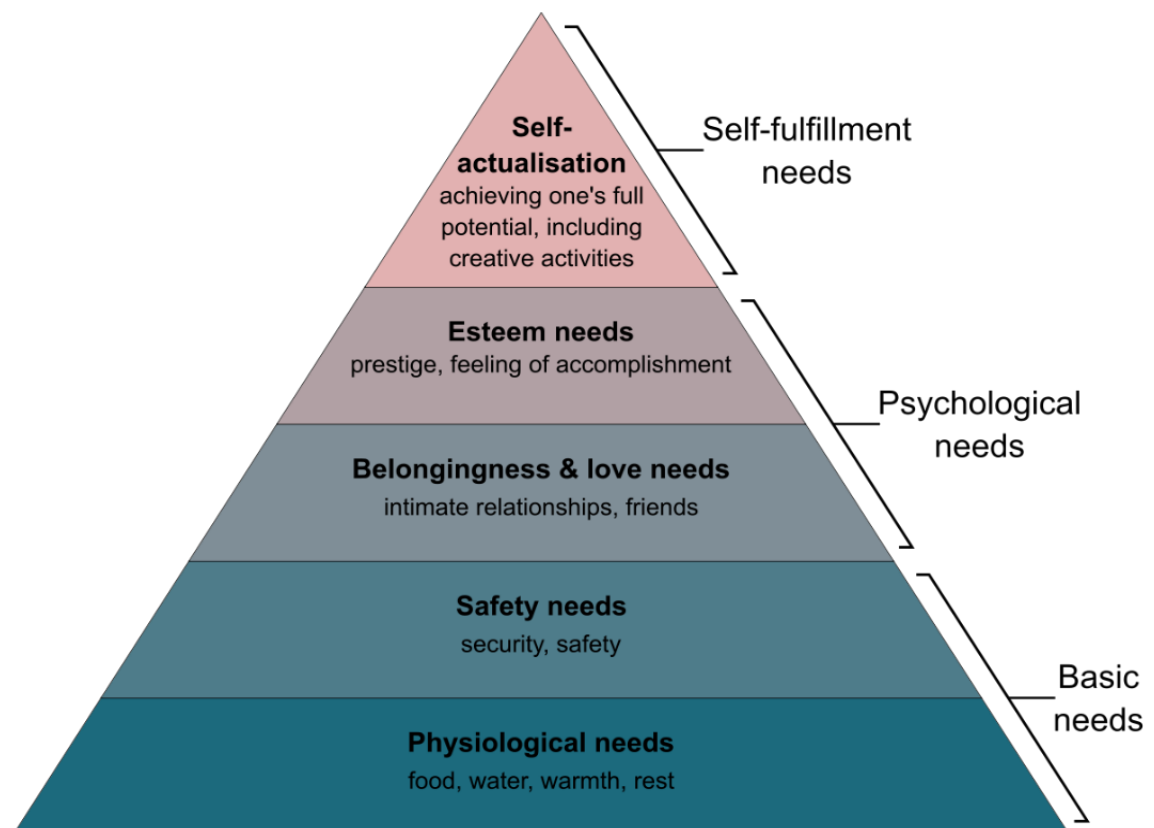
Within the court system's adversarial framework – which sets out to achieve public safety, accountability, and rehabilitation – it is not always clear when parent involvement is needed or how parents can reliably advocate for their families' needs (Harvell et al. 2004). As a result, juvenile justice practitioners have begun to adopt the wraparound and family engagement principles promoted by many children's mental health system-of-care models. Like the model featured in *Juvenile Justice 101*, peer support models are designed to help parents navigate the juvenile justice system (Davis et al., 2010). In addition to providing resource booklets and

scripted orientations, peer partners offer one-on-one appointments to answer questions in four key areas: information about the court, interacting effectively with the court, reassurance and support, and linkages to community resources. As a result, parents feel more supported when paired with a peer partner and more empowered when equipped to navigate the juvenile justice system (Walker et al., 2015). In turn, parents can provide their child with confidence and comfort as they navigate the reentry process together.

1.2 Basic Needs Support

American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943) hypothesized that “humans are motivated toward psychological growth and self-awareness” but must satisfy their basic needs before pursuing their advanced needs (Mennella & Holle, 2018). In ascending order, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs includes physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-

Figure 2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs2 (Image Credit: Wikimedia Commons)



actualization. Physiological and safety needs are illustrated as the most basic needs for survival and include food, air, water, shelter, rest, safety, and security (see Figure 2.2). Per Maslow's theory, only upon securing the family's basic needs can youth begin to focus on their psychological and self-fulfillment needs.

Peer partners help parents navigate community resources as families strive to achieve meet their housing, food, education, employment, healthcare, and immigration needs. Peer partners are familiar with completing the often lengthy, bureaucratic process that government systems require applicants to complete. Furthermore, peer partners can draw upon their lived experience (Walker et al., 2015) when navigating non-profit resources available to needy families to help parents secure all the resources they qualify for in the most efficient approach.

1.3 Family Therapeutic Services

Mandated counseling is a tool used by the juvenile court system to affect youths' lives by helping troubled youth shift into a positive trajectory (Dyson, 2020). While youth therapeutic services are typically designed to help youth process their trauma and equip them with healthy coping skills, family therapy services are designed to strengthen the relationship between youth and their primary caregivers (Jacobsen & Zaatut, 2020). The primary caregiver may also learn the new strategies the youth is mastering in individual therapy. Furthermore, teaching parenting skills and enhancing warmth and caring between the parent and child can improve youth reentering the community – especially for youth with family relationships as an identified criminogenic need.

When examining the role of the parent-child relationship in youths' antisocial behavior, researchers have discovered a general association between children's state of well-being and the quality of parental care provided (Fergus et al., 2017). The social bond theory contends that

higher quality parent-child relationships – measured by the parents’ ability to satisfy their child’s needs – can “buffer against and decrease the likelihood of delinquency” (Jacobsen & Zaatut, 2020). Rule §51.115 (d) of the Texas Family Code authorizes the court to order parents into counseling or parenting courses. However, parents are more likely to give a genuine effort when they voluntarily participate in services instead of being court-ordered.

1.4 Court Engagement

The Texas Family Code is clear about the parent’s expectation at court hearings. It states that each parent or guardian shall attend their child’s court hearings (Texas Family Code, Rule §51.115(a)), be provided an interpreter, if needed (Texas Family Code, Rule §51.17 (d)), and has the right to retain employment when attending their child’s hearing (Texas Family Code, Rule §51.115 (a)). The peer partner is a crucial resource and helps the parent understand their rights under the law and their role in the court hearings (Walker et al., 2015). Parents are further empowered by hearing court proceedings interpreted in their native language, which can add to their understanding of the judicial system. This normative criterion is key to reentry because parents can be more attentive to their youth’s court assignments when directly hearing the order from the court, parent buy-in increases when they participate in the planning, and the parent-youth relationship improves when parents celebrate successes with their child.

1.5 Transition Planning

Parent involvement in transition planning is heavily reflected in juvenile justice legislation, demonstrating parents and caregivers' essential role in the reentry and reintegration process. Under Texas Government Code, Rule §501.099, "The department shall adopt and implement policies that encourage family unity while an offender is confined and family participation in an offender's post-release or post-discharge transition to the community" (Texas

Inmate Welfare Code, 2015). The family's input at transition meetings is essential to get them to commit to the established goals (VERA Institute of Justice, 2014). Along with their peer partner, parents can advocate for their wishes for the youth, including attendance at family activities and religious ceremonies.

The parent-as-partner model includes parents as vital team members in all youth rehabilitation elements and reentry elements. More than anyone else, they understand the complex dynamics in the family and the barriers that may lead to recidivism. Juvenile justice agencies are encouraged to consider the parent and other natural supports as team members by orienting them to the program, including them in meetings, inviting them to partake in celebratory events, creating a forum for their feedback to be heard, and including them in planning and decision-making along the way. Most youth return to their parents' residence upon discharge from their treatment program, so incorporating the family throughout the process can lead to long-term success. In addition to strengthening family ties, juvenile justice agencies are encouraged to strengthen pro-social community connections by incorporating mentorship and faith-based programs.

Case Management is a central tenet to a comprehensive youth reentry strategy because youth enter the juvenile justice system with complex needs that may hinder reentry success if left unmet (Carney et al., 2003). While most of these needs are identified through validated risk-needs assessment tools and addressed by clinicians, other conditions must be determined by a comprehensive needs-assessment and addressed by social workers. Based on the wraparound framework, comprehensive case management is designed to leverage community resources to help youth meet their basic needs and improve family functioning, pro-social peer relationships, and positive recreational opportunities (Eber & Nelson, 1997). Basic needs such as housing, clothing, and healthcare must be addressed before focusing on more complex matters like education, employment, and substance treatment. Case managers specialize in working with youth to establish goals based on their short-term and long-term needs, develop a realistic plan to meet identified goals, and monitor progress along the way.

In some counties, juvenile probation officers serve as case managers in addition to their community supervision duties. However, the assignment of an independent case manager can ensure youth and families have a professional focusing on social service needs throughout the treatment, reentry, and reintegration process (De Nike et al., 2019; The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2017). Termed "continuity of care," this long-term service provision produces a comprehensive, cohesive service plan that can be executed by departmental staff and community providers. In addition, case management aims to create long-term community linkages because they lead to youth and families gaining independence from the juvenile justice system.

2.1 Wraparound Services

Wraparound is an intensive, individualized, highly collaborative approach that includes the child, family, and service providers operating collectively to develop, implement, and evaluate each part of a service plan or reentry plan (Carney & Buttell, 2003). The wraparound process's trademark is that youth and family perspectives drive decision-making and service provision, directly correlating to RNR's Responsivity Principle (Andrews et al., 2011). In turn, case managers spend most of their time relationship-building, identifying natural supports, and providing referrals to community service providers (De Nike et al., 2019). With support from a team of social service professionals and natural supports, case managers bring family stability, which is essential when supporting youth with a well-supported transition home. Researchers have concluded that most youth are receptive to comprehensive service programs intended to help them address their basic needs, engage in education and employment, and choose pro-social pathways (McCarter, 2016). Thus, researchers' consensus is that "wraparound services are superior to standard methods of care for troubled youth" (Wilson, 2008). Furthermore, studies have highlighted the positive impact wraparound services have on justice-involved youth. Specifically, youth who received wraparound services were less likely to engage in antisocial behaviors than youth who did not receive wraparound services (Maschi & Killian, 2011).

2.2 Positive Youth Development

The last few decades have seen a shift toward using an evidence-based program modality known as positive youth development (PYD). PYD embraces the notion that youth have the capacity to succeed, meet their potential, and contribute positively to their community when supplied with appropriate resources and supports (Edberg, 2008). Researchers assert that the PYD framework promotes better reentry outcomes because of its primary focus on protective

factors (Scales et al., 2005). Successful reentry is not solely defined by reducing risk exposure to reduce recidivism but also highlights each individual's potential (OJJDP, 2014). Theoretically, the PYD approach represents an "explicit rejection of an exclusive focus on addressing what is wrong or deficient in behavior to emphasize, instead, how young people's skills and abilities can be nurtured and improved" (Leman et al., 2017). Moreover, PYD aligns well with the individualization and resilience framework by focusing "on the individual, family, and community assets that promote positive well-being" (Scales et al., 2005).

As outlined in Figure 2.3, five characteristics form the foundation of positive youth development: confidence, competence, caring, character, and connection (Damon, 2004). Similarly, the Search Institute has released a list of 40 external and internal developmental assets that form the foundation for positive youth development (<http://www.searchinstitute.org/assets>). Programs grounded in the PYD framework support developing youth competencies and assets while enhancing their connections to the community. Activities that steer youth away from antisocial behaviors and toward traditional adulthood include school, skill-building, employment, volunteering, and civic engagement. (Bazemore & Terry, 1997). Additional activities associated with positive youth development include parental monitoring, parental warmth, and participation in religious activities (Johnson et al., 2020). It is no wonder that engagement in PYD activities has been associated with lower levels of antisocial behavior, depression, and substance use (Scales et al., 2005).

Figure 2.3 Outcomes of Positive Youth Development (Image Credit: Karen Pittman)



The Good Lives Model (GLM) has been promoted as an alternative and enhancement to RNR. GLM differs from RNR in that it promotes a positive, strengths-based, and restorative model of rehabilitation (Andrews et al., 2011), as opposed to RNR which has been critiqued for taking a deficit-oriented approach. GLM suggests personal fulfillment naturally reduces dynamic risk factors by attaining the benefits of “friendship, enjoyable work, loving relationships, creative pursuits, positive self-regard, and an intellectually challenging environment should be the primary goals for rehabilitation” (Andrews et al., 2011). The theory contends, that if youth are intrinsically motivated to achieve their goals, then reductions in dynamic risk factors will follow. GLM’s growing body of research may soon result in an evidence-based practice designation, especially if coupled with other essential reentry components.

2.3 Community Linkage

Community linkage is an essential reentry and reintegration function as it serves to connect youth and families to long-term community supports – reducing system involvement while increasing family independence. Community is the environment within which systems, organizations, and programs, intersect with relationships, social norms, and resources (OJJDP, 2014). A significant challenge of community partnerships is bringing diverse contributors together. However, thoughtfully procured partnerships can lead to better social services outcomes for youth and their families, increase access to knowledge and expertise, and draw a wider pool of experienced professionals to create relevant youth services (Wilson, 2008). Achieving more significant impact through efficiencies and enhanced effectiveness can, in turn, increase case managers’ ability to individualize service provision. Differences lie in each youths’ experience, family environment, crime severity, offense history, age, race, religion, and sex. Researchers assert that youth are less likely to reoffend when practitioners match youth and families with services that satisfy their individual and specific needs (Carney & Buttell, 2003).

2.4 Continuity of Care

Lack of communication, consistency, collaboration, and coordination between juvenile justice and community-based youth treatment and enrichment services have long plagued the advancement of truly reintegrative processes, particularly regarding mental health, drug treatment, education, and employment needs. The concept "continuity of care" originated in social work and medical practices where providers share information across systems to prevent mismanagement of the patient or client's case and increase the likelihood of a comprehensive, cohesive service plan (Carney et al., 2003). Whether measured by probation violations, law enforcement contact, or new offense, the failures experienced by juvenile justice agencies can usually be attributed to discontinuity. Researchers and practitioners believe the continuity of care concept holds boundless potential in reversing persistent reentry challenges (OJJDP, 2014). Under Texas Inmate Welfare Code, Rule §501.093, counties are required to establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with providers as a method to increase information sharing and provide a continuity of care for justice-involved youth.

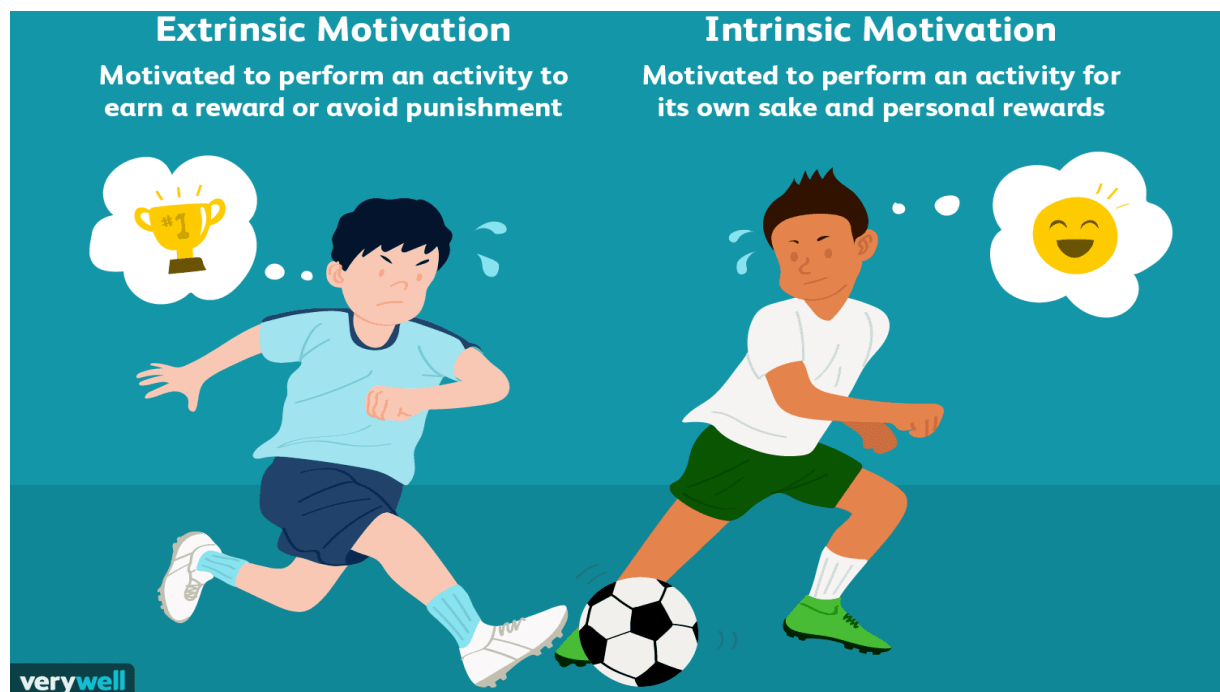
Youth motivation is a complex concept. Contemporary literature (Mowen et al., 2018) has influenced juvenile justice's approach to youth engagement, motivation, and compliance. This evidence-based framework guides practitioners in their attempts to modify misbehavior. If a primary goal of probation is to help youth get back on track to productive adulthood, then taking a solely punitive approach misses valuable opportunities to encourage accountability, motivate long-term positive behavior change, and promote positive youth development (Harvell et al., 2018). Further, the Urban Institute introduced evidence to support Youth Motivational Tools as a category for a comprehensive youth reentry and reintegration strategy (Harvell et al., 2018). Researchers acknowledge the importance of incentivizing success through positive reinforcement (Harvell et al., 2018), providing a workbook for goal and progress tracking (OJJDP, 2018), and balancing incentives with accountability measures.

Positive reinforcement is implemented in various techniques that encourage and motivate youth, including praise, specific instructions, special awards, tokens and privileges, and positive role models. The use of incentives generates departmental and public discourse because adults often expect youth to present positive behaviors without warranting incentivization. However, research has found that incorporating accountability interventions and incentives can produce positive reentry outcomes (Mowen et al., 2018). Underlying operant learning theory asserts "that behavior is learned through the consequences that result from one's actions" (Skinner, 1966). In other words, youth will continue exhibiting desirable behaviors that result in positive feedback while ceasing undesirable behaviors. Although accountability interventions refer to formal punishments or therapeutic interventions in response to non-compliance, incentives can also promote compliance and positive change.

3.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is characterized as “self-derived interest, which requires supportive conditions to secure cognitive and social development.” Beginning with evidence-based practices like motivational interviewing, individuals tap into their deepest desires and goals for their life. Next, the youth set realistic goals and benchmarks for their progress and engage in activities that align with their values, personal goals, competencies, and expectations of success or failure. Researchers contend that more intrinsically motivated youth are usually less aggressive, with fewer antisocial behaviors, and make a stronger connection to activities that align with their values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). This notion suggests a correlation between effective control mechanisms and increased value attached to the desired behavior or activity (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Ward et al., 2004). Primarily extrinsically motivated youth are more likely to disengage and have low responsivity to interventions than intrinsically motivated youth (Ward et al., 2004). Interventions are more beneficial for extrinsically motivated youth if they internalize the activity’s utility and are encouraged to attach it to their intrinsic motivation.

Figure 2.4 Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation (Image Credit: Very Well Mind)



Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can guide treatment if practitioners individualize their approach by matching intervention deliveries to each youths' needs and desires (Rudes et al., 2021).

3.2 Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation occurs within an individual when external forces: 1) encourage a specific outcome and 2) illuminate the value of engaging in an activity. Behavior management theorist Frederic Skinner introduced the concept of operant conditioning to disrupt undesirable behavior and encourage desirable behavior. Skinner believed that a desirable outcome was possible by changing the youth's behavior. Skinner concluded that youth who exhibit more disruptive behaviors tend to be motivated by external factors and less so by internal compulsion. This belief aligns with those researchers who assert that aspirations, motivations, and goals may be influenced by the individual's environment versus internal desires (Libbey, 2004).

It is likely that when youth engage in antisocial behavior, they experience less internal motivation to modify their actions, which may explain why they were also unmotivated from the start. Conversely, treatment programs experience more significant success when youth are intrinsically motivated (McMurrin, Theodosi, & Ward, 2006). Therefore, juvenile justice agencies are encouraged to embrace the operant learning perspective by reducing the focus on punishment for non-compliance and increasing the focus on incentives for positive behavior. RNR theorists reinforce this balanced approach, promote positive reinforcement, and encourage practitioners to build on youths' strengths and reward pro-social behavior (Andrews et al., 2011).

The simplest form of positive reinforcement is giving verbal praise. Encouragement or praise imparts confidence and strength in youth (Phelps, 1997). Educators use verbal praise to motivate students – praising positive behavior and being specific about behaviors that exemplify what is desired. Researchers assert that verbal praise is the first step in changing behaviors.

Motivating justice-involved youth can be challenging, but the positive outcomes can be gratifying.

Incentive structures effectively motivate behavior change among youth. Incentives can be used to reward short-term and long-term accomplishments. Contingency Management (CM) is an approach for incentivizing behavior and attitude changes (Trotman & Taxman, 2011). In particular, CM utilizes incentives to motivate and shape positive behavior by “influencing individual thinking patterns” (Rudes et al., 2021). The CM framework principles help strengthen the foundational reasoning for utilizing incentives in a reentry program. From the operant learning perspective, utilizing incentives would result in lower levels of recidivism and higher levels of positive achievement.

Incentive structures are most effective when they include a wide range of non-monetary and monetary rewards and incentives that promote positive youth development. Furthermore, incentive structures should reflect youths’ pro-social interests (Harvell et al., 2018), be individualized and sustainable, and be administered immediately following the desired behavior (Farell et al., 2020). Additionally, incentives can promote positive youth development when practitioners offer gift cards, supplies, and equipment that lead to pro-social interactions with peers and positive, caring adults (Harvell et al., 2018). For instance, incentive categories may include recreation, the arts, education, employment, family bonding, and more. The items featured in each category would go toward furthering youths’ growth in those areas. Finally, practitioners benefit from engaging youth, parents, and supportive adults in determining meaningful incentives (Harvell et al., 2018).

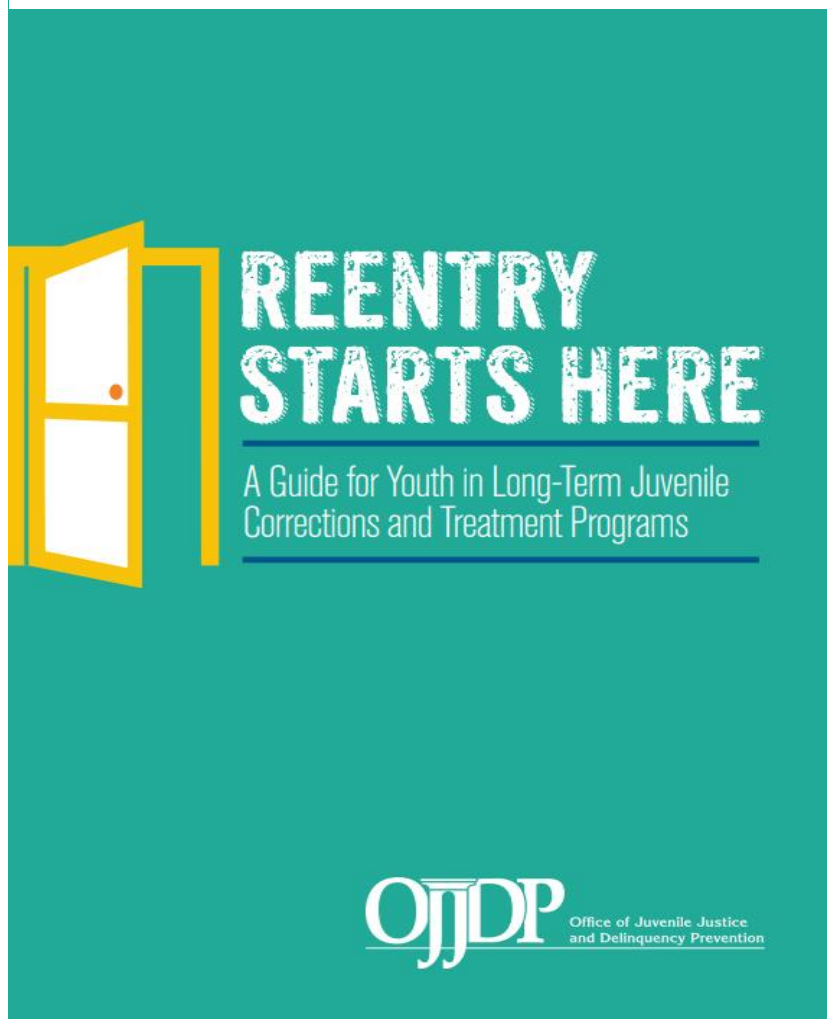
Finally, there is a disconnect between research and practice regarding incentives noted as far back as 1994 in an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention publication. The authors stated, “Although it is widely recognized that tangible and symbolic rewards and praise

play an important role in demonstrating to individuals the benefits and satisfaction that can be derived from socially acceptable accomplishments, recognition of achievement is all too rare in aftercare (Altschuler, David. M., et al., 1994).” Unfortunately, though, there is an entrenched reluctance to fund incentives, despite a wealth of research that shows they have a unique influence on cognition during the adolescent years and that rewarding behavior can make adolescents work harder. As noted by the National Research Council, this reluctance poses a formidable barrier to implementing this effective practice (National Research Council, 2013).

3.3 Motivational Tools

Workbooks can be an informative, supportive, and essential resource for youth as they embark on their unique reentry and self-discovery journey. Participating in a juvenile justice program can be confusing and frightening for youth and families (Mowen et al., 2018); a hands-on workbook serves to demystify the program’s expectations (Purkis, 2014) and empower youth and families, consequently increasing intrinsic motivation (Wodahl et al., 2011). Whether youth track SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely), court appearances, or incentive selections, workbooks serve to orient

Figure 2.5 Reentry Workbook (Image Credit: OJJDP)



and organize youth during a critical transitional period in their lives (Harvell et al., 2018). The overwhelming benefit of this kind of self-examination is an utmost necessity for reentry preparation. Additionally, youth's reentry success is enhanced by professionals and parents utilizing and reinforcing the benefits of the workbook.

Practitioners propose workbooks should be youth-centric, age-appropriate (Harvell et al., 2018), and multi-dimensional: full of practical information, meaningful exercises, engaging activities, fun illustrations, and even inspiring stories. The workbook offers opportunities for youth to inventory their skills, talents, and interests. The workbook should be ideal for youth to work through by themselves, with a parent, or with a professional (Helbert, 2013). The language used should be clear and youth-friendly. Youth can revisit their workbook at the end of their reentry journey to reflect on all the obstacles they have overcome (Testa, Coolhart & Peta, 2015). If the creator covers all these bases and brings to life the reentry process, youth can feel prepared and supported in bringing self-determination to their reentry journey.

Case Study – Accountability and Incentives Management (AIM) System: The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) developed the Accountability and Incentives Management (AIM) system “to promote supervision compliance and completion, reduce rates of supervision violations and recidivism, prevent detention and new placements resulting from supervision violations, decrease probation terms, and address racial disproportionality.” Furthermore, AIM was designed to remove the uncertainty associated with an informal approach to youth accountability and rewards by providing systematic guidance. To this end, AIM uses a wide range of progressive accountability interventions proportionate to the non-compliant behavior and risk-level of youth; youth earn incentives for making progress toward their short and long-term goals.

Farrell, Flath, and Irvine's (2020) study of AIM asserts that youth supervised after AIM's enactment had fewer probation violations, new residential placement commitments, or new referrals that resulted in an adjudication than youth supervised without AIM enactment. Researchers also concluded that staff showed a higher tendency to use accountability interventions than incentives to modify behavior, opposing the recommended practice offered by preceding research (Wodahl et al., 2011). Factors that could have contributed to this outcome include under-documenting verbal praise, lack of resources for incentives, lack of staff buy-in or knowledge regarding incentives, and system-related barriers such as reduced supervision levels and contacts. Notably, practitioners took steps to increase youth and family perceptions of fairness by explaining each accountability intervention and incentive administered. Following AIM guidance, responses must occur within proximity of positive or negative behavior so that youth can learn the relationship between the behavior and the response (known as celerity). During the study, responses to negative and positive behaviors were applied almost immediately— within three days on average.

Juvenile justice agencies can align their practices with research by incentivizing success through positive reinforcement. Providing positive reinforcement throughout the reentry process is designed to increase positive behavioral change (Harvell et al., 2018) and retention. Whether providing tangible incentives or increased privileges, youth-centric motivational tools increase and maintain desired behaviors.

Accountability Measures

Accountability measures are essential to youth compliance, deterring recidivism, and maintaining community safety. In 2013, the National Research Council (NRC) released a report emphasizing the alignment between adolescent development and the juvenile justice system's goals, specifically, holding youth accountable, ensuring judicial fairness, considering victim impact, and preventing reoffending. Research on standardized response systems – usually comprised of an array of accountability interventions and incentives – has demonstrated an increase in compliance with supervision conditions (Nagin, 2013). Fair application of these responses is essential to promoting procedural justice and decreasing the likelihood of reoffending. Most importantly, accountability measures are intended to meet these objectives before employing detention or re-incarceration.

4.1 Standardized Accountability Interventions

The hallmark of standardized response systems is that they emphasize accountability rather than punishment, especially considering: 1) that youth typically experience non-compliance with probation conditions, 2) further system involvement can be harmful to youth, and 3) productive means of accountability promote healthy social development (Nagin 2013). Researchers suggest that responses to non-compliance should be proportionate to the behavior (severity), immediate, and fair. Whenever possible, agencies are encouraged “to take individual circumstances into account, consider the context around a violation, and recognize that not all violations reflect” ill intent (Harvell et al., 2018). Furthermore, using a structured decision-making process, such as a standardized response grid, to choose an appropriate response increases fairness. When youth understand the consequences of violations, they can logically

connect the action and its consequence. Researchers assert that the most prominent strategies for behavioral change are verbal warning and verbal praise.

4.2 Fairness

Within the juvenile justice arena, the primary priorities include reducing victimization rates and delinquency while enacting strategies to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. Significant steps are being taken throughout the government to improve youth outcomes and well-being by identifying and eradicating racial and ethnic disparities. Along with civil rights advocates, lawmakers, and community members, juvenile justice officials remain committed to realizing a fair and just system. Still, disproportionate minority confinement has been a long-standing problem for juvenile justice systems. In 2015, the youth of color “accounted for 69% of offenders in residential placement” in the U.S., and in 2017, the placement rate for youth of color was more than twice that of their white counterparts (OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book).

Figure 2.6 Racial Bias (Image Credit: Washington Post)



Startling statistics suggest that minorities represent approximately two-thirds of youth in residential facilities (Sickmund et al., 2019) and are more likely to be detained for technical violations than their white counterparts (Rosay & Everett, 2006). Also, Black youth are more likely to receive accountability interventions when violating probation and less likely to receive

incentives when they comply. Accountability interventions must be fairly and equitably administered to see a reduction in existing racial and ethnic disparities (Harvell et al., 2018).

4.3 Restorative Justice Approaches

A restorative justice approach promotes positive accountability while keeping youth in their communities. Restorative justice programs are designed to restore the trust between youth and victims/community by allowing victims to be heard and youth to take responsibility for their actions. The interactions are intentionally non-adversarial and designed to encourage youth accountability, victim empowerment, and community engagement (Harvell et al., 2018). These procedures restore victims of crime and the community while expanding the circle of belonging for youth. Furthermore, restorative justice approaches transform the attitudes, values, and beliefs of all involved in the justice system, including juveniles, victims, and citizens.

Juvenile justice agencies must ensure their restorative justice programs allow victims an opportunity to express how the youth's actions have impacted the victim. Victims must also be given space to ask any questions that may be unanswered regarding the offense and have an active role in determining how the offender can be meaningfully accountable for their actions. Additionally, victims tend to benefit from hearing the offender recount the crime in their own words and accept responsibility. For the offender, this should serve as an opportunity to take responsibility for their actions, learn the human impacts of their actions, and directly address the harm done.

A case study on Oregon's Governor's Task Force on Juvenile Crime included the task force's account of the complex relationship between public safety and child welfare. The analysis demonstrates that no treatment program (nor reentry program) can adequately honor the youth's welfare or the public safety without personal accountability (McMahan, 2019): "Too

much focus on either the “public safety” or the “child’s welfare” sets up a false dichotomy. The juvenile’s “welfare” is important to public safety because concern for the juvenile’s “welfare” reflects, among other things, a concern that the juvenile does not become a recidivist or adult offender later in life. Thus, protecting public safety is a vital component of any program of accountability and rehabilitation designed to be in the juvenile’s “best interest.” The concept that links the “public safety” with the “welfare” of the juvenile is the concept of personal accountability. Without personal accountability, no treatment program or incarceration adequately protects the juvenile’s “welfare” or the “public safety.”

Accountability measures come in various applications, but critical tenets of any reentry program include fair and proportionate application, restorative justice approaches, and a balance of accountability interventions and rewards. As mentioned in the previous section, pairing accountability interventions and rewards yields more significant outcomes than an individual administration. Therefore, practitioners are encouraged to respond to the youth and family’s individual needs when administering both accountability and positive reinforcement. Moreover, juvenile justice agencies in larger communities are experimenting with the benefits of reentry specialty courts to enhance youth, family, and departmental accountability.

Chapter Summary

The four practical categories discussed in this chapter comprise a comprehensive youth reentry and reintegration strategy founded in literature: parent engagement and support, case management, youth motivation, and accountability measures. Figure 2.7 summarizes the model into a conceptual framework, then ties it to the conducted literature review. The main categories are then narrowed to incorporate specific components that agencies can consider when designing, administering, evaluating, or enhancing programs that serve youth reentering and

reintegrating into their communities from a secure treatment program. The next chapter describes the methodology used to evaluate and refine these ideal components that comprise a comprehensive youth reentry and reintegration program.

Figure 2.7 Conceptual Framework

<p>Title: A Model Assessment Tool for a Comprehensive Youth Reentry and Reintegration Strategy: A Case Study of the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department’s SOAR Reentry Court Program</p> <p>Purpose: The objective of this applied research project is threefold: 1) to take a gauging approach to describe the practical ideal type categories of a comprehensive youth reentry and reintegration strategy obtained from the literature; 2) to examine the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department’s “Strengthening Opportunities for Achieving Reentry” (SOAR) Reentry Court program against these ideal type components; and 3) to provide useful recommendations for strengthening the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department’s SOAR Reentry Court program.</p>	
Ideal Type Components	Literature
<p>1. Parent Engagement and Support</p> <p>1.1 Peer Partner Support</p> <p>1.2 Basic Needs Support</p> <p>1.3 Family Therapeutic Services</p> <p>1.4 Court Engagement</p> <p>1.5 Transition Planning</p>	<p>Andrew, D.A., Bonta, J., & Wormith, J.S. (2006); Butts, J.A., Bazemore, G., & Meroe, A.S. (2010); Davis, T. S., Scheer, S. D., Gavazzi, S. M., & Uppal, R. (2010); Dyson, J. C., Sr. (2020); Fergeus J, Humphreys C, Harvey C and Herrman H. (2017); Harvell, S., Rodas, B., & Hendey, L. (2004); Humphreys, C., Harvey, C., Herrman, H., & Fergeus, J. (2019); Jacobsen, Shannon K. & Zaatut, Amarat. (2020); Mennella, H., Holle, M. (2018); Minnis H and Del Priore C (2001); Shields, P.M. and Rangarajan, N. (2013); Walker, S., Bishop, A., Trayler, K., Jaeger, R., Gustaveson, S., & Guthrie, A. (2015).</p>
<p>2. Case Management</p> <p>2.1 Wraparound Services</p> <p>2.2 Positive Youth Development</p> <p>2.3 Community Linkage</p> <p>2.4 Continuity of Care</p>	<p>Altshuler, D. (1999); Bazemore, Gordon, and W. Clinton Terry. (1997); Carney, M. M., & Buttell, F. (2003); Christle, C. A., Jolivet, K., & Nelson, C. M. (2005); Damon, W. (2004); De Nike, M., Shelden, R., Macallair, D. & Menart, R. (2019); Edberg, Mark C. (2008); Fabelo, T., Arrigona, N., Thompson, D., Clemens, A. Marchbanks, M. (2015); Johnson, E., Kilpatrick, T., Bolland, A., Bolland, J. (2020); Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (2018); Leman, P. J., Smith, E. P., Petersen, A. C., & SRCD (2017); Luesse, H. B., & Luesse, J. E. (2019); Maschi, T., & Killian, M. L. (2011); McCarter, S. A. (2016); Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2014); Scales, Peter C., Karen C. Foster, Marc Mannes, Megan A. Horst, Kristina C. Pinto, and Rutherford, A. (2005); Race Matters for Juvenile Justice. (2011); Texas Inmate Welfare Code</p>

	(2015); The Council of State Governments Justice Center (2017) Wilson, K. J. (2008).
3. Youth Motivation 3.1 Intrinsic Motivation 3.2 Extrinsic Motivation 3.3 Motivational Tools	Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J., & Wormith, J. S. (2011); Butts, J.A., Bazemore, G., & Meroe, A.S. (2010); Brooks, M., & Khan, R. (2015); Cheung, C. S. S., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2012); Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002); Farrell, J., Betsinger, S., Flath, N., & Irvine, J. (2020); Harvell, S., Love, H., Pelletier, E., Warnberg, C., & Hull, C. (2018); Lupton, R., & Kintrea, K. (2011); Mowen, T. J., Wodahl, E., Brent, J. J., & Garland, B. (2018); Nelson, C.M., Jolivet, K., Leone, P.E., & Mathur, S.R. (2010); OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book; Phelps, V (1997); Purkis, J. (2014); Rudes, D. S., Viglione, J., Sheidow, A. J., McCart, M. R., Chapman, J. E., & Taxman, F. S. (2021); Testa, R. J., Coolhart, D., & Peta, J. (2015); Trotman, A. J., & Taxman, F. S. (2011); Wodahl, E. J., Garland, B., Culhane, S. E., & McCarthy, W. P. (2011).
4. Accountability Measures 4.1 Standardized Accountability Interventions 4.2 Fairness 4.3 Restorative Justice Approaches	Harvell, S., Love, H., Pelletier, E., Warnberg, C., & Hull, C. (2018); Leiber, M. J., & Peck, J. H. (2013); McMahan, C. L. (2019); Nagin, D. S. (2013); National Research Council. (2013); Rodriguez, N (2018); Rosay, A., & Everett, R. (2006); Sickmund, M., Sladky, T. J., Kang, W., & Puzzanchera, C. (2019); Travis, J. (2005); Trotman, A. J., & Taxman, F. S. (2011); Wood, P. B. (2007).

Chapter III: SOAR Overview

Introduction

The Travis County Juvenile Probation Department recognizes that youth reentering the community from a secure placement face a variety of challenges as they reintegrate into their schools, families, and home communities. SOAR is the department's initiative to support youth and families during this critical period. Launched in August 2019, SOAR's mission is to enhance community safety by providing a stable, well-supported strategy for returning youth to the community through a continuum of comprehensive services that addresses identified reintegration needs.

Travis County Juvenile Probation Department describes SOAR as a comprehensive reentry court program operated by TCJPD and the Travis County Juvenile Court. SOAR believes strengthening family and community connections is the key to a safe and successful transition. Through positive youth development activities, motivational tools, and a strength-based approach, youth are engaged within their communities, schools, peer groups, and families productively. Furthermore, SOAR promotes self-accountability and independence.

The SOAR Reentry Court program centers on the support of a team that includes the youth, the family, the 98th District Court, and a Support Team of professionals working collaboratively to address each youth's individual needs. The Support Team is a multidisciplinary unit comprised of a Probation Officer, Counselor, and Care Coordinator. An optional Family Partner is available to support the parent as they navigate the juvenile justice system and community resources. This core team supports the youth and family through the completion of placement and community reentry and reintegration. Finally, at critical points within the program, SOAR conducts formal court proceedings to instill a sense of importance, accountability, and continuity for youth engagement, treatment, and reentry success.

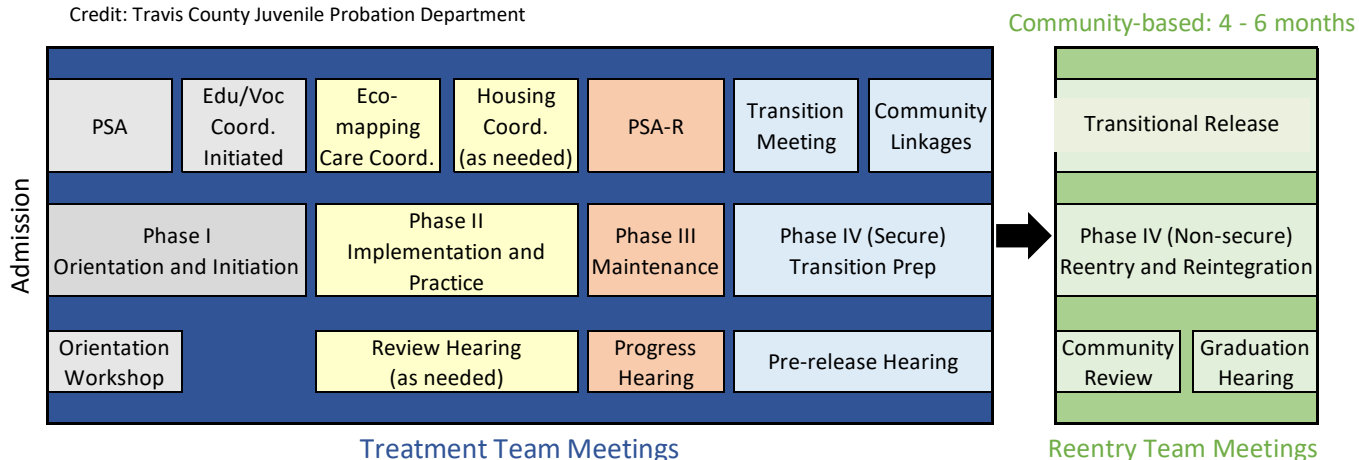
Program Structure

Each Travis County youth placed at the W. Jeanne Meurer Intermediate Sanctions Center (ISC) participates in the SOAR Reentry Court program. Upon admission to ISC, youth are assigned Support Team members to include a Probation Officer, Counselor, and Care Coordinator. Youth also participate in a Psychosocial Assessment (PSA), which identifies treatment areas to provide the blueprint of each youth's individualized treatment plan.

Treatment within the ISC program has historically been structured in a three-phase format. With the launch of the SOAR Reentry Court program, a fourth phase was added to continue addressing criminogenic needs and promoting prosocial behavior in the community. Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) interventions and skill-building is the primary treatment modality; however, practitioners employ a wide variety of methods, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PET), and Sex Offender Treatment. Youth spend an average of seven to nine months in the residential portion of the program (Figure 3.1).

3.1 – SOAR Process Overview

Credit: Travis County Juvenile Probation Department



In Phase I – Orientation and Initiation – the goal is for youth to learn the rules of the program, understand their treatment goals, and demonstrate a willingness to participate in treatment. Essentially, this is the stage youth become acclimated to the program.

Youth in Phase II – Implementation and Practice – demonstrate a willingness and motivation to complete the program while learning important skills to better manage behavior and address their criminogenic needs. Residents are more willing to process emotions and behaviors that led them to the juvenile justice system. This happens through chain analysis/processing, emotional and behavioral modification, and youth consistently utilizing skills to minimize dynamic risk.

In Phase III – Maintenance – youth are expected to consistently practice their DBT skills, exhibit leadership on the housing unit, and demonstrate a commitment and ability to integrate new skills into their daily lives. Toward the end of Phase III, the primary focus is on reentry planning. The youth and family's progress, treatment objectives, and preliminary community reintegration plans are detailed to the Court in a Phase III Progress Report. Phase III concludes when the youth achieves treatment objectives and practitioners complete a reentry-focused Psychosocial Assessment (PSA-R). The PSA-R outlines a youth's updated risk factors. These factors and recommendations are reviewed at the Transition Meeting and incorporated into the Phase IV Reentry Plan. The completion of the PSA-R signifies the youth is ready to embark on the journey of reentry and reintegration.

Phase IV – Phase IV is considered the last phase of treatment. This phase is split into Phase IV-Secure and Non-Secure. This phase begins in placement to allow time for transition preparation and ends in the community. Phase IV-Secure – Transition Prep – is a two to four-week period dedicated to participating in transition activities such as the Transition Meeting, Pre-Release Hearing, and establishing community goals and connections. With the support of the SOAR team, the Phase IV Reentry Plan is finalized which builds on the work the youth and family have completed during Phases I-III. Ultimately, the goal of Phase IV to ensure that the progress made in treatment is sustained in the community and to provide enough support to help

youth and family navigate the reentry period. In Phase IV-Non-Secure – Reentry and Reintegration – youth practice their DBT skills in the community while completing tasks relevant to their reentry goals. The Support Team follows the youth into the community and serve as a support system as they navigate the community, their family, and peer pressure. The ultimate goal is for youth to achieve their reentry goals outlined in the Phase IV Reentry Plan and graduate the SOAR Reentry Court program.

Chapter IV: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used in the case study to compare the components of the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's (TCJPD) *Strengthening Opportunities for Achieving Reentry (SOAR) Reentry Court* program against the model outlined in Chapter II. In June 2021, the researcher employed structured interviews and direct observation research methods to assess the strength of SOAR's alignment to the literature. Also included in this chapter is a table that operationalizes the conceptual framework, a description of the participants and methods for collecting data.

Operationalizing the Conceptual Framework

Table 4.1 shows how the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter II is operationalized to collect data from SOAR administrator interviews and direct observations of SOAR Reentry Court to assess the strength of SOAR's program components against the reentry model. Included are each of the four components from the preliminary model and the corresponding questions asked in the survey and interviews.

Figure 4.1 Operationalization Table

Title: A Model Assessment Tool for a Comprehensive Youth Reentry and Reintegration Strategy: A Case Study of the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's SOAR Reentry Court Program	
Purpose: The objective of this applied research project is threefold: 1) to follow a gauging approach and consult the literature to describe the ideal type categories of a comprehensive youth reentry and reintegration strategy that is rooted in practical and empirical research; 2) to conduct a case study to examine the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's "Strengthening Opportunities for Achieving Reentry" (SOAR) Reentry Court program – comparing SOAR's program components against the literature's ideal type components; and 3) to provide practical recommendations that can strengthen the alignment between SOAR's program components and the literature's ideal type components – in an attempt to improve youths' reentry and reintegration outcomes.	
Ideal Type Components	Method
1. Parent Engagement and Support	
1.1 Peer Partner Support	Administrator Interview: What types of pre- and post-release peer-to-peer support is offered for parents/guardians in the SOAR Reentry Court program?
1.2 Basic Needs Support	Administrator Interview: What pre- and post-release supports are available to help families meet their basic needs?

1.3 Family Therapeutic Services	Administrator Interview: What pre- and post-release therapeutic services are offered to families to increase functional family dynamics?
1.4 Court Engagement	Administrator Interview: What opportunities exist for families to engage with the court and participate in the court process? Direct Observation: Observe court to witness opportunities for family involvement.
1.5 Transition Planning	Administrator Interview: How are parents/guardians incorporated in the transition planning process? Direct Observation: Observe court to witness opportunities for family involvement.
2. Case Management	
2.1 Wraparound Services	Administrator Interview: Does the program offer wraparound services as a modality of case management?
2.2 Positive Youth Development	Administrator Interview: What types of positive leisure activities are youth encouraged to complete during the SOAR program to increase youth competencies or connect them to a caring adult? Direct Observation: Observe court to witness discussions with youth regarding positive youth development.
2.3 Community Linkage	Administrator Interview: How much emphasis is placed on linking youth/families to the community for resources?
2.4 Continuity of Care	Administrator Interview: What efforts are made to ensure the continuity of services throughout the program (e.g., pre-release to post-release; post-release to program completion)?
3. Youth Motivation	
3.1 Intrinsic Motivation	Administrator Interview: In which ways are youth encouraged to tap into their intrinsic motivation? Direct Observation: Observe court to witness youth expressing intrinsic motivation.
3.2 Extrinsic Motivation	Administrator Interview: What types of extrinsic motivating factors does the program offer youth? Direct Observation: Observe court to witness opportunities for extrinsic motivating factors.
3.3 Motivational Tools	Administrator Interview: What types of tools can youth use to track their progress and stay motivated throughout the reentry process? Direct Observation: Observe court to witness opportunities for motivational tool usage.
4. Accountability Measures	
4.1 Standardized Interventions	Administrator Interview: What standardized interventions or accountability guidelines exist and are shared with youth/families? Direct Observation: Observe court to witness the administration of standardized interventions.
4.2 Fairness	Administrator Interview: How does the program institute a fair and balanced approach to prevent racial and ethnic disparities?
4.3 Restorative Justice Approaches	Administrator Interview: What restorative justice approaches are used at different points within the program?

Method of Data Collection

a. Structured Interviews

Participant Recruitment

Convenience and random sampling were used to identify eight representatives to participate in the case study. First, the researcher relied on the expertise of the TCJPD Research Project Manager (RPM) to identify a comprehensive list of SOAR program administrators with at least one year of in-depth knowledge about the agency's reentry strategy.

Next, the RPM sorted the administrator names among their respective disciplines: Legal, Policy, and Program Administration. If more than one administrator was represented in a particular discipline, then the researcher employed random sampling to narrow the participants: the researcher assigned a number to each administrator in the identified category, utilized an online random number generator to populate a number within the given range, matched the populated number with the corresponding administrator, and selected this administrator to participate in the study. A total of five unique and three random administrators were selected.

Finally, the RPM contacted each administrator to explain the research project, highlight the voluntary nature of the case study, and encourage their participation. Administrators who expressed interest in participating were forwarded to this researcher for further contact. All eight administrators expressed interest.

Interview Process

Prior to the commencement of the interview, each administrator was provided a copy of the informed consent document to familiarize themselves with the research procedures and their rights. Once the interviewees provide written consent to be interviewed, the researcher scheduled a 90-minute interview on a mutually convenient day.

During the structured interview, the researcher read a script highlighting elements from the informed consent and highlighting the researcher's goal to gather information about each administrator's experience and knowledge within the SOAR program. Participants were also reminded that the study solely concentrated on the program's foundational elements, not on its effectiveness nor specific cases.

Participants gave their verbal consent to proceed with the interview allowing the researcher to commence with interview questions. The researcher questions centered on SOAR's resources, services, and programs in the following areas: parent engagement and support, case management, transition planning and preparation, youth motivation, and accountability measures. The last question of the interview asked, "Is there anything else I should know about SOAR?"

In addition to the structured interview format, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed to highlight the administrator's unique perspectives. IPA frames the administrator as a subject matter expert, produces a personal record of SOAR's components, and highlights the administrators' thoughts and feelings about said components. This approach has become a popular method for analyzing personal accounts for small samples in recent years (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Subsequently, the researcher reviewed personal notes and each transcript several times before analysis began to ensure familiarity. Noted were interesting and significant responses, as well as potential themes. Then, the researcher recorded emerging similarities between participants' themes and normed them across each category. Featured in the results section are those responses and themes mentioned by a majority (or five out of eight) of the administrators. Finally, the researcher assigned a pseudonym (e.g., Administrator B) to each administrator to protect their identity. Said pseudonyms are used throughout this study.

Direct Observations

The researcher conducted direct observations of SOAR's Reentry Court process. A total of 14 hearings were observed over four days. Court hearings are scheduled a week in advance according to the progress of each youth. The researcher had access to court hearings due to their role in the department and was provided permission by departmental representatives to observe for these research purposes. Court was observed to witness opportunities for family involvement in court, family involvement in planning, discussions with youth regarding positive youth development activities, opportunities for extrinsic motivating factors, opportunities for motivational tool usage, and the administration of standardized interventions.

Next, the researcher organized the observations according to these subcategories and assigned a pseudonym (e.g., Hearing 2) to each court hearing to protect the participants' identity. Said pseudonyms are used throughout the Results chapter. Finally, each example served as evidence that the subcomponent was foundational to the program. And, the more examples that existed, the higher the Evidence Rating for that subcategory. The support level – or how closely the evidence adhered to the model – is summarized at the end of each subcomponent in the Results chapter (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013).

Human Subjects Protection

The researcher submitted the research project for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas State University, IRB #7796. IRB's mission is "to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects conducted or supported by Texas State University" (Texas State University, 2021). Accordingly, the Board reviewed information to include potential risks and participant recruitment and data collection procedures. Upon receiving approval for the research project, the researcher began the participant selection process outlined above.

Furthermore, the researcher stored raw data collected from interviews and direct observations on a Texas State University-protected platform on the Texas State University server. The university will destroy the data three years after collection, following federal law. Finally, interview and direct observation results have been reported in an aggregate format to protect the identity of the administrators and SOAR participants.

Chapter Summary

The Methodology chapter described the interview participants, procedure, and interview methods of collecting data, and the process court observations. The next chapter will compile the findings, limitations, and practical policy recommendations designed to strengthen alignment between SOAR's program components and the literature. Once completed, jurisdictions can use the model to create, administer, evaluate, and enhance youth reentry strategies, tailoring it to their unique needs.

Chapter V: Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the results of the interviews and court observations are reported, analyzed, and discussed. Figures and tables display the data compiled from the administrator interviews and court observations to assess SOAR's alignment to the four key components identified as an effective youth reentry program. Comments are included to highlight the meaningful results, and summaries of the qualitative components of the interviews and quantitative components of the court observations and give a broader perspective of the insights provided by both. The chapter concludes with an overall summary of the data collected in the research process as outline in Table 5.1.

Parent Engagement and Support

As indicated in Chapter II, **Parent Engagement and Support** is foundational for a comprehensive youth reentry strategy. Supporting parents with meeting basic needs, engaging parents in family-centered therapeutic services, encouraging parents' presence and participation in court, and including parents in transition planning can lead to a reduction in their youth's dynamic risk factors or an increase in their protective factors – often reducing the risk to re-offend. Furthermore, parents may be better equipped to support their justice-involved youth when receiving peer partner support.

1.1 Peer Partner Support



Chapter II concluded that parents feel more supported when paired with a peer partner and more empowered when equipped to navigate the juvenile justice system. In SOAR's case, a peer partner, or peer-to-peer support, is defined as a parent with experience navigating the SOAR program or serving as a resource for new parents in the SOAR program. Administrator interviews concluded that SOAR does not currently offer peer-to-peer supports for parents navigating the SOAR program primarily due to the program's infancy and the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, with the role of the family partner available to provide familial support and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) groups functioning as a pseudo support group, many administrators saw peer-to-peer support as an aspirational goal of the program but not an urgent need.

Family Partners

Family partners are TCJPD employees who serve as a support and advocate for the parent before and during the youth's return home. The assignment of a family partner is voluntary for the parent and may be assigned at any time. However, when the family has numerous needs for

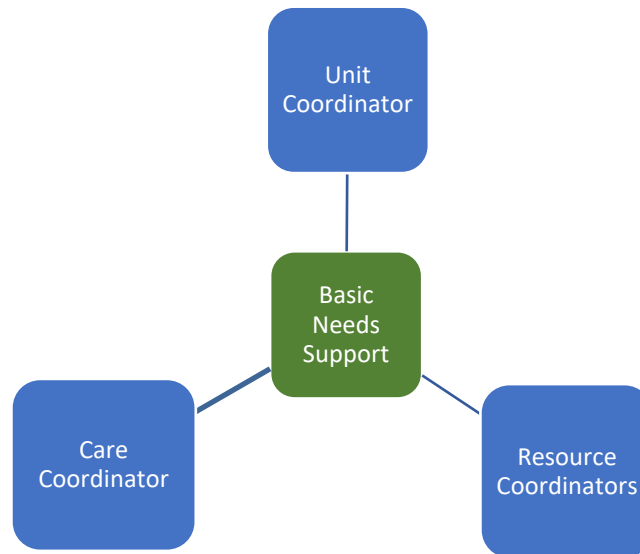
housing, essential services, employment, or education, that seems to indicate to the team that they should encourage the parent to accept a family partner. Family partners have the flexibility to meet a variety of familial needs in the community, such as navigating systems and completing necessary applications for essential services, including financial assistance, housing, or immigration. These professionals also help identify and bolster natural supports in the community to assist the family in the long term. Trained in Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP), family partners can provide various services to enhance parenting skills, such as DBT curriculum-based parenting skills and (DBT) parenting skills groups.

Parent DBT Groups

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy parent groups are offered in English and Spanish, and some modules are “designed for parents to support each other like a support group.” Parents participating in the groups may have youth in the residential facility or in the community, which allows for parents further along in the program to share their experiences and offer advice to parents in the early stages. However, administrators were transparent in noting that the modules conducive to this rich dialogue are few and far between, resulting in few opportunities for parents to connect with other parents who have lived experience.

1.1 Peer Partner Support Evidence Rating: Adequate Support

1.2 Basic Needs Support



Support in getting access to resources is essential to stabilize the family for the youth's success. Family partners, unit coordinators, care coordinators, resource coordinators were all mentioned as SOAR's response to the challenge of the basic needs. To this point, Administrator B suggested, "CC's and FPs serve as traditional social workers." There have been a lot of instances where there is a parent with multiple children and struggling. Even some basic needs, such as a bed, can be challenging for parents to secure. The coordinator and family partners do a great job providing enough wraparound services and support to the youth and family to ensure a successful outcome. Administrators highlighted the family partner role in the previous section, so most administrators focused on the functions of the unit coordinator, care coordinator, and resource coordinators in this section.

Unit Coordinator

Administrators explained that since the SOAR program begins in the secure residential facility, unit coordinators take a leading role in helping youth meet their needs. SOAR administrators describe unit coordinators as departmental staff who serve as in-facility liaisons,

providing case management services for residential youth in collaboration with the youth's counselor, juvenile probation officer, and the education and vocation staff. Serving as a parental figure and role model, unit coordinators ensure youth receive all treatment, services, and care, including hygiene products, dietary restrictions, and points/level system. Additionally, unit coordinators communicate with the family to share and gather pertinent information about the family's status and youth's progression. Relevant information is then shared with the Support Team for consideration during discharge planning. Consequently, the frequent oversight of the youth's daily needs creates a familial bond. Administrators C and D explained that due to this familial bond developed while in placement, many youth maintain contact with their unit coordinator even upon release to the community.

Care Coordinator

Administrators described the care coordinator role as providing case management services to the youth in collaboration with the family, providers, ancillary service providers, and others to achieve identified goals and maximize positive outcomes for the youth and family. Assigned at admission, care coordinators work directly with the youth and family to assess their needs and initiate planning while in ISC and during Phase IV. These professionals have multiple contacts with the youth before and after court to help them set and accomplish goals, attend appointments, choose incentives and prepare for upcoming hearings. Care coordinators attend Transition Meetings and Treatment Team Meetings and communicate pertinent information about the youth and family to other team members. Care coordinators are an integral part of providing input for the Phase IV Reentry Plan along with the other team members. Care coordinators follow up with youth and families to review the next steps after each court appearance and help youth achieve goals and positive youth development opportunities in the community.

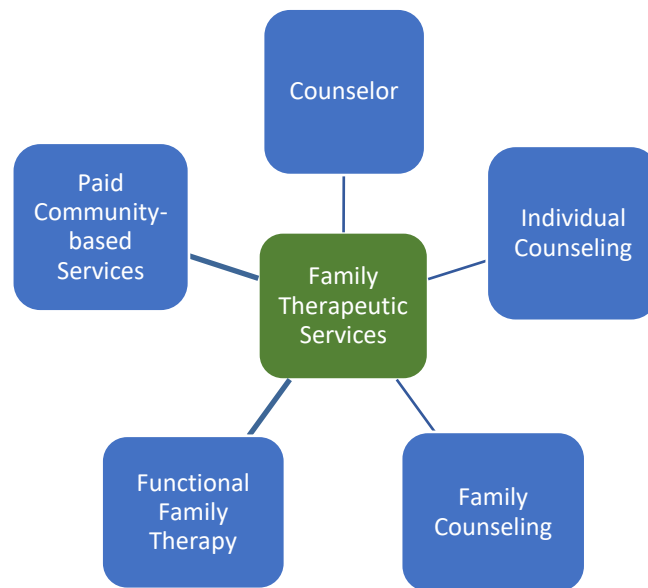
Resource Coordinators

Administrators described resource coordinators as playing an essential role in supporting youth and families with meeting their basic needs. Resource coordinators canvas available services in the community relevant to the needs of the youth and families involved with juvenile probation. The coordinators cultivate relationships with community partners and identify appropriate resources to address criminogenic and enrichment needs. Each resource coordinator has a specialized area of focus, including vocation/employment, education, personal enrichment, housing, and essential services. Resource coordinators attend SOAR team meetings and court hearings as needed to share progress and challenges with coordinating resources for the youth and family. Resource coordinators also assess the youth/parent's needs, provide ongoing case management, coordinate programs, and communicate regularly with Support Team members.

Administrator B explained that the education coordinator is instrumental in helping parents navigate the education system that has traditionally been resistant to reintegrating youth who have been in placement. For example, during the coronavirus pandemic, the education coordinator secured laptops and internet connections for youth to ensure their participation in remote learning. Without the assistance of this coordinator, many youth would fail to reenroll in school post-release.

Administrator G also shared an instance where a youth was in the residential facility, and his family was without stable housing. The parent was participating in family sessions from the car because she was couch surfing. The housing coordinator was able to secure a resource that paid off the parent's delinquent bills, secure her an apartment, and furnish the home. The administrators shared numerous anecdotal stories they witnessed in SOAR, showing the critical nature of securing resources and stabilizing the family before the youth returns home. Instability in the home is a significant risk factor and can lead to recidivism.

1.4 Family Therapeutic Services



Family therapy services are designed to strengthen the relationship between youth and their primary parents. This bond is essential to successful reentry because higher quality parent-child relationships can buffer against and decrease the likelihood of delinquency. Parents and youth want to reunify but due to challenges they experience early in the reentry process, the parent-child relationship often begins to breakdown. SOAR's response is evident through the continuum of care provided by the counselor and a host of youth and parent therapeutic services, including individual and family counseling, Functional Family Therapy, process groups, and paid community-based services. A review of voluntary participation in these services have led to significant breakthroughs.

Counselor

When youth are admitted to the residential facility, they begin working with an assigned counselor for weekly individual sessions and bi-weekly family sessions to address their

identified criminogenic needs and associated mental health needs. Counselors are responsible for developing, supporting, and monitoring the youth's individual, group, and family treatment progress. Trained in DBT, the counselor also conducts family therapy with the youth and parent/guardian focused on assisting families in building skills that help the youth be more successful when in the home. Counselors share updates with the treatment team, reentry team, and court. Most youth like their counselor because they have built deep trust over the many months in treatment. In the past, youth were resistant to transferring therapeutic services to a new counselor, so SOAR is designed the counselor's support to continue into the community.

In the community, the counselor's continued support provides the family with a sense of stability, normalcy, and consistency. Many administrators suggested a greater need for therapeutic services post-release to help with the acclimation of the youth's reentry and reintegration. Near the end of the SOAR process, treatment begins to reach a natural conclusion, indicating the counselor can terminate services or transition the youth or family to an external provider.

Individual Counseling

Individual counseling follows Risk-Needs-Responsivity principles by centering counseling on primary areas that led to the youth experiencing the juvenile justice system. The counselor begins individual sessions with rapport building and motivational interviewing. They aim to help youth come to the realization that they want to make the change. Counselors employ CBT to help change youth's thought processes and behaviors; however, DBT is the primary treatment modality because of its versatility. DBT provides more structure for the individual and group sessions and offers a wide range of skills the youth can use, including strategies for effective communication with their parent. Finally, individual counseling allows youth to process

their past trauma. Youth not only learn to cope with historical events but also learn to cope ahead in preparation for situations that can happen in the community.

Family Counseling

SOAR administrators explained that because family dynamics can be very complex and can significantly impact youths' behavior, each family counseling session is very individualized. Family counseling involves reviewing roles and how they contribute to youth experiencing the juvenile justice system, validating experiences, helping parents validate the youth's experience, educating parents, assisting parents in implementing boundaries, reviewing previous system involvement cases, helping youth insert their voice correctly, and supporting with boundary development. According to Administrator B, family counseling allows a neutral party to facilitate transparent dialogue between the youth and parent(s). Family counseling participants could include siblings, extended relatives, and parent partners. However, it is clear to all administrators that family counseling can be an intense process. Administrator A revealed some parents are resistant to therapeutic services altogether. They believe the juvenile justice system should "fix" their child, return the child to the family, then get out of their life. SOAR administrators disagree with this approach because they rarely see a change in the youth without family involvement in counseling.

Furthermore, family counseling helps parents provide reinforcement and consequences. Administrator D explained that often SOAR parents are very hard workers and need to work several jobs. They are focused on helping youth get their needs met and not necessarily providing youth with emotional support. Consequently, youth fail to receive attention or validation until something terrible happens in school, or they become delinquent. Therefore, counselors help parents to reinforce behavior at the correct times and for positive reasons. Administrator D continued by stating through family counseling sessions that youth and parents

learn that two things can be true: the youth and family are presently experiencing the juvenile justice system, but the youth can also change.

Administrator G revealed that one youth could not speak with her mom effectively, which led to a breakdown in communication. Individual counseling and family counseling helped to disrupt negative cycles within the relationship. Working remotely has benefitted counselors because they can see how youth interact with parents, siblings, and other family members in their natural state. This insight increased their responsiveness by employing targeted interventions.

Functional Family Therapy

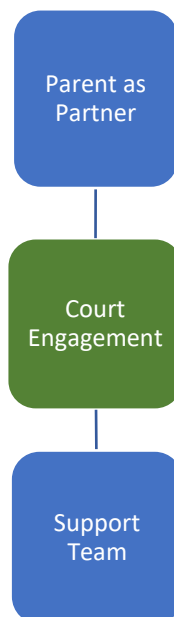
Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is an evidence-based, in-home treatment modality designed to address and strengthen family dynamics. A team of departmental employees provides FFT for a minimum of four months while the youth continues receiving individual counseling from his original SOAR counselor. FFT is designed to work with the youth and as many family members as possible. FFT counselors go to the home to observe the family dynamics, provide behavioral modification techniques, and help facilitate understanding between the parent and youth. SOAR administrators admit transitioning the family to a new therapist is challenging because the family has already worked with their original counselor for six to nine months. However, families are only referred to FFT if a higher level of care is needed. As described by Administrator H, this service may be recommended by the original SOAR counselor or the court when there is conflict in the family, or the youth fails to abide by probation rules. Again, though, the family must be a willing party along the way.

Paid Community-based Services

At any point, parents can be referred for paid individual therapy, or even couples therapy, through a contract provider. Some parents have been set up with individual counseling to work through traumatic events in their life. Many administrators echoed Administrator G's perspective, "You can't be the best parent or support system for your child until you work through your personal issues." Therefore, parents can elect to participate in individual therapy with a community provider at any time.

1.3 Family Therapeutic Services Evidence Rating: Strong Support

1.5 Court Engagement



As indicated in Chapter II, youth are more likely to achieve their reentry goals when parents engage in the reentry and court process because most youth rely on familial support to achieve their reentry goals. Additionally, parents are more likely to buy into a plan and provide support when they participate in the planning process. Finally, the parent-youth relationship

improves when parents celebrate achievements with their children. Therefore, SOAR's strategy is to view the parent as an active partner and use the Support Team as a conduit to incorporate the parents' voice.

Parent as Partner

SOAR administrators view the parent as a partner at every step of the process. For example, Administrator F explained, "The family is considered a team member, so their engagement is vital... The parent is the most knowledgeable about their child and has the most to offer." Most administrators echoed this same sentiment, including the importance of the parents' court involvement.

SOAR brings judicial oversight from the 98th District Court into reentry planning from admission to the ISC through SOAR discharge. SOAR court sessions include the dedicated District Judge, assistant district attorney, defense attorney, Support Team members, resource coordinators, and most importantly, the youth and parent. SOAR parents are invited and encouraged to attend every court hearing throughout the 12-18-month SOAR program. This rigorous participation schedule could become overwhelming for parents with jobs and other family obligations. However, the coronavirus pandemic transitioned court to a virtual setting, which allowed parents some flexibility in selecting their court appointment time. Also, parents are provided translation services to receive and deliver information in their native language. Further, parents can join hearings by phone if they are unable to connect virtually. This abundance of accommodation enables the parent to remain involved, empowered, and heard.

The court also invites other youth-related stakeholders to share their perspectives on the youth's progress. Invited stakeholders could include the youth's employer, coach, teacher, or extended relative. The court aims to receive a holistic assessment of the youth. To this end, court sessions typically begin with each Support Team member presenting a progress report to the

court. Then, the youth and parent are encouraged to explain how things are going. For instance, Administrator E shared that the judge often asks the parent if there is anything to add, even if it is just to solicit the parent's perception of the youth. For example, the judge often asks, "Are you proud of your kid? Have you noticed a difference?" This line of questioning is not only intended to provide the youth with positive reinforcement, it is also designed to empower the parent by giving them a voice in the court proceedings and decision-making. Administrator G continued by stating, "The youth's triumphant strides are being recognized by the parent in an open forum which builds the relationship between the youth and parent." These program characteristics are further evidenced through direct court observations.

The researcher observed 14 court hearings. Nine of the 14 hearings included the presence of a caregiver, and seven of the 14 hearings had direct testimony from the parent. Hearings 1 and 2 were Graduation Hearings, which included a celebration of the youths' reentry accomplishments. The judge asked each parent how they felt about their child's success. The parents in both hearings shed tears while describing the transformation they saw in their youth. However, they were equally grateful to the court and Support Team members for their assistance along the way.

In Hearing 7, the youth violated probation on several occasions leading the judge to ask the parent to provide the court with her recollection of events leading up to and during the youth's weekend disappearance. Hearing 8 provided another example of parent engagement when the judge asked the parent how she felt about her son's progress. Responding through an interpreter, the parent remarked, "I'm very proud of him." There are even times when the judge must encourage greater participation from the parent, as evidenced in Hearing 11. In this hearing, the parent was unresponsive to the housing coordinator, and the judge was concerned about the

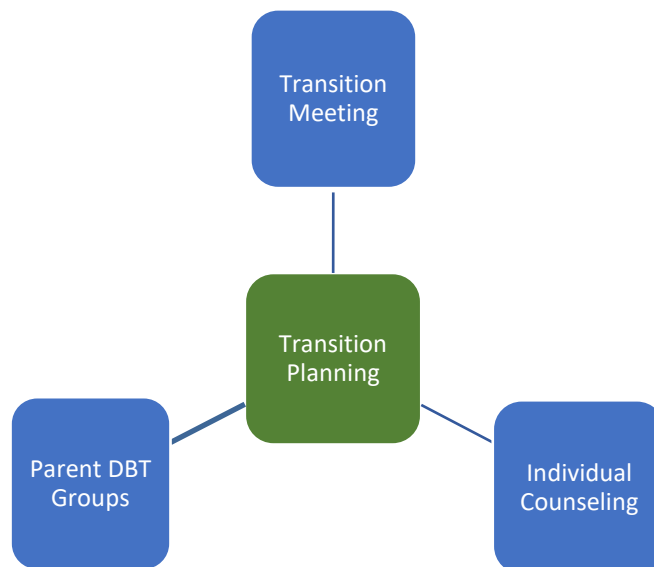
youth's instability. In this case, the judge asked the parent to prioritize completing the housing applications to provide stability for the youth and family.

Support Team

Each Support Team member's role is designed to maintain frequent contact with the parent, whether for probation accountability, therapeutic services, or resource and service coordination. Parents commonly speak to the court on their own behalf, but there are instances where they want to share sensitive information with the court privately. In this case, a Support Team member may address the court on the parent's behalf before or during the hearing. Administrator G shared an example of the parent privately requesting the court keep the youth in the treatment facility to work through unaddressed trauma before being released.

1.4 Court Engagement Evidence Rating: Adequate Support

1.5 Transition Planning



Transition planning begins during Phase I but intensifies at Phase III, and this is about the time the parents begin getting incorporated in the transition planning process. At this stage, members of the Support Team are working with the parent to develop a plan for the youth's return: probation rules, living arrangements, education and employment goals, transportation considerations, and technology needs. This discussion is happening before the Transition Meeting. Therefore, all the details should be worked out by the Transition Meeting. SOAR administrators believe reentry planning should start early and be discussed often. Even when the youth reenters the community, challenges will still arise, but the infrastructure and relationships are already fortified to provide adequate support. Administrator B shared, "The program does not end when the youth transitions to the community; in fact, that's when some of the hardest work begins."

Transition Meeting

In Phase IV-Secure, the Support Team meets with the parent and youth to outline services needed in the community to address the identified criminogenic needs, wants, risks, and protective factors of the youth and family. Since SOAR's model begins reentry planning at admission, the Transition Meeting is the culmination of efforts to identify the supports needed and desired by the youth and family. In other words, the purpose of this meeting is not to come up with a reentry plan but rather to solidify the plan that has been in development since admission to placement.

Present at the Transition Meeting is the youth, the parent/guardian, probation officer, counselor, care coordinator, reentry coordinator, unit coordinator, and other stakeholders such as a family partner, resource coordinators, school liaisons, and support staff. Furthermore, the youth's natural supports are encouraged to attend, including a mentor, pastor, or relative. These

are the stakeholders who know the youth best and will likely be the first people to help the youth achieve his goals and notice when the youth is regressing.

During the Transition Meeting, a deliberate focus on anticipated challenges and risk factors the youth and family may face upon the youth reentering the community. Referencing the PSA-R and other relevant assessments, the team members collaborate to continue developing a comprehensive and cohesive Phase IV Reentry Plan to include accountability measures, service linkage, and community connections. Also included is an outline of the goals and objectives related to addressing criminogenic needs. Approximately three weeks after the Transition Meeting is the Pre-Release Hearing. The youth is released soon after that.

During direct observations of SOAR hearings, the researcher noted the judge solicited parent input in at least 64% of the hearings and youth input in 100% of the hearings. Their input was highly considered before making any decisions or finalizing plans. For instance, in Hearing 10, the parent was familiar with the youth's runaway history and informed the court she was willing to place noise activating devices on the home windows and doors. Additionally, during Hearing 14, the judge asked the team to work with the parent to develop a plan for curfew.

Individual Contact

Support Team members are in frequent contact with the parent on an individual basis. Whether it is with the unit coordinator or care coordinator discussing the youth's basic needs, or the probation officer reviewing the probation rules, the parents as transparent about their capabilities to support the youth. Contact requirements range from weekly to monthly, depending on the discipline and purpose of the contact. During these sessions, parents receive updates on their youth, provide input on their youth's treatment plan, and share updates about their circumstances in the community (e.g., housing). Within weeks of leaving the facility, each discipline begins enacting the reentry plan by setting appointments for Texas ID, school

registration, healthcare, and job opportunities. Finally, most parents lack essential items for their child who has been out of the home for six to twelve months. Therefore, the care coordinator ensures the family is connected with resources for a bed, groceries, and clothing prior to the youth's release.

Simultaneously, youth complete planning and reflection pages in SOAR's Passport to Success workbook (e.g., select incentives, complete questionnaire, transcribe their goals, note the Support Team's contact information), review the items in their Starter Kit Backpack (e.g., school supplies, wallet, lanyard keychain), and begin to terminate relationships with staff members and youth they have grown to confide in and trust. Ending this contact can be challenging for youth because trusting relationships are so important to them.

Parent DBT Groups

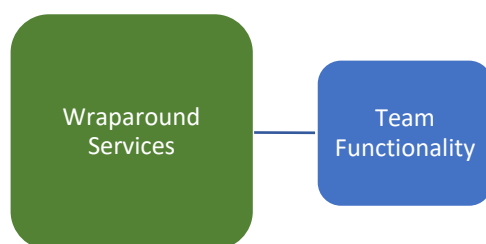
Parents attend parent DBT groups to become familiar with the terminology and skills their youth is learning in treatment. Parents essentially learn to speak the youth's language. For instance, as described by Administrator G, the STOP skill directs youth to take a deep breath and consider the consequences of their actions before they react. If parents learn this same STOP skill, they are more inclined to use the language when they notice the youth giving a poor reaction. The parent may say, "I think you need to use your stop skill and take a moment before you react." Parent DBT groups also give parents the tools to implement the structure youth need, similar to the experience youth had in the secure facility. Despite the efforts to orient parents to their youth's skill-building modules, Administrators recognized that there are few efforts to engage the parent in meaningful decision-making during the treatment process, and parents are currently omitted from structured planning sessions until the Transition Meeting.

1.5 Transition Planning Evidence Rating: Adequate Support

Parent Engagement and Support Overall Rating: Some Improvement Needed

Case Management is a central tenet to a comprehensive youth reentry strategy because youth enter the juvenile justice system with complex needs that may hinder reentry success if left unmet. Comprehensive case management, based on the wraparound framework, is designed to leverage community resources to help youth meet their basic needs and improve family functioning, pro-social peer relationships, and positive recreational opportunities. Basic needs such as housing, clothing, and healthcare must be addressed before focusing on more complex matters like education, employment, and substance treatment. Case managers specialize in working with youth to establish goals based on their short-term and long-term needs, develop a realistic plan to meet identified goals, and monitor progress along the way.

2.1 Wraparound Services



Team Functionality

SOAR administrators recognize they are working with the highest risk and needs youth who require the best resources the public, private, and non-profit sectors have to offer. In turn, administrators modeled the highly collaborative relationship of the care coordinator, juvenile

probation officer, and counselor, also known as the Support Team, to function as a wraparound team. Administrator A explained that the Support Team works together to develop individualized plans for each youth; along the way, resource coordinators offer their expertise in education, employment, personal enrichment, housing, and basic needs, and other resources are provided to the family such as a family partner and Functional Family Therapy.

All SOAR administrators believe SOAR's model achieves similar outcomes to organizations like TCJPD's partner, The Children's Partnership, only without adhering to the fidelity established by organizations like the National Wraparound Initiative. Further, Wraparound was described as a team of professionals collaborating to provide a comprehensive, responsive menu of resources to address the youth and family's complex needs—additionally, the team advocates for options and services to facilitate the youth and family's long-term success. Administrator A explained the difference between the evidence-based “Wraparound” and SOAR's “wraparound”: Wraparound, with a capital “W”, has fidelity while wraparound with a lowercase “w” includes the general elements of the artform but forgoes the fidelity.

Administrator B further explained that all care coordinators are trained annually by the National Wraparound Initiative, including two of five SOAR care coordinators who carry a caseload under The Children's Partnership umbrella. Furthermore, Administrator B provided three primary reasons SOAR decided against modeling case management after a national wraparound organization. The first reason is that SOAR includes three central figures collaborating on the service delivery and coordination for each family, unlike most Wraparound models that focus on one central figure – the care coordinator. For instance, Wraparound dives deep into the family story with the care coordinator while SOAR unpacks those events with the counselor. Second, SOAR youth begin receiving services in the facility and then transition to the community, unlike most Wraparound models that are solely community-based. Finally, the

SOAR program is administered by the court (court-ordered), unlike most Wraparound models that begin services only with parents who apply voluntarily.

SOAR still achieves the Wraparound trademarks by ensuring that youth and family perspectives and strengths drive decision-making and service provision. It also ensures Support Team members relationship-build to identify natural supports, provide referrals to community-based service providers, and bring stability by addressing the family's basic needs. Researchers identified these as essential tenets to reduce antisocial behaviors in justice-involved youth (Maschi & Killian, 2011).

2.1 Wraparound Services Evidence Rating: Strong Support

2.2 Positive Youth Development



Chapter II concluded that Positive Youth Development embraces the notion that youth have the capacity to succeed, meet their potential, and contribute positively to their community

when supplied with appropriate resources and supports. The PYD framework promotes better reentry outcomes because of its primary focus on protective factors. It also rejects an exclusive focus on addressing what is wrong or deficient in behavior to emphasize, instead, how young people's skills and abilities can be nurtured and improved. Five PYD characteristics include confidence, competence, caring, character, and connection. Programs grounded in the PYD framework steer youth away from antisocial behaviors and toward traditional adulthood include school, skill-building, employment, volunteering, and civic engagement. Despite the challenges presented to most agencies due to the pandemic, SOAR still provided a wide variety of services.

Pre-release Activities

SOAR administrators recognize leisure and recreation as a criminogenic need, essentially meaning that without positive leisure activities to structure youth's days, they can become associated with antisocial peers and commit offenses. Administrators described SOAR's robust menu of pre-release activities to include fitness, sports tournaments, vision board design, art projects, music production, classical guitar, spoken word, virtual programs, race and gender-specific activities, industry-recognized certifications, driver's permit classes, life skills training, job skills training, and vocational training. Administrator C witnessed youth having an enhanced sense of motivation and hope for their future upon completing many of these activities. Several vocational training classes are taught by instructors who offer to help youth find employment just out of the instructor's care for the youth. Relationships with community-based instructors are best for engaging youth in prosocial activities and connecting them to positive, caring adults.

Administrator F explained that connecting youth with prosocial peers and positive adults helps keep youth on a positive path. These positive influences likely result in the introduction to an entirely new and positive peer group. Administrator C continued, "Youth often change while in residential placement, but their friends and community haven't changed. So, youth can easily

get sucked back into the same patterns and friendships they had.” Administrator D explained that juvenile justice youth often lack access to caring and positive adults to whom they relate. So, when youth connect with an adult living a prosocial life, they can see themselves in that mentor. Administrator D continued, “Black youth benefit from someone who looks like them because black kids want to be like other black people, so it’s good to see positive role models. This likely also applies to the LatinX community.” As a result, SOAR places a heavy emphasis on linking youth with mentors before the youth transitions to the community.

SOAR youth enjoy having a mentor. Upon meeting in the residential program, the youth and mentor begin developing a voluntary relationship that transfers into the community. Mentors are known to be responsive to youths’ interests, cultural needs, and probation responsibilities. Administrator H shared that mentors have taken youth shopping to spend their incentive, joined youth at the park to play basketball, and conversed while doing one another’s makeup. These long-lasting bonds have the potential to expand youths’ horizons and change their entire perspective on life. While observing Hearing 12, the researcher witnessed the youth sharing with the court that he enjoys spending time with his mentor. They often play football and eat McDonald’s hamburgers which is something they both enjoy. Similarly, in Hearing 14, the youth went out with a mentor to get ice cream and decided to go to a theme park in the near future. In both instances, the youth was overjoyed about the experiences they were having with the mentor.

Post-release Activities

During the community phase of the program, youth are responsible for achieving assignments outlined in the passport to include three Positive Youth Development (PYD) activities and a community service project. PYD activities offer youth insight into what the community can do for them and help them build their skills and build relationships with agencies, positive adults, and positive peers. On the other hand, the community service project

gives youth insight into what they can do for the community and help them grow a stronger attachment to the community to reduce the likelihood of harming it. In addition, both activities generate and strengthen relationships in the community where they can maintain after juvenile justice is no longer involved. To emphasize the importance of these two activities, the program awards three points for each of the three PYDs to total nine points, and five points for the community service project. Essentially, completing these two activities is 33% of the 42-point graduation requirement.

While observing Hearing 8, the researcher witnessed the judge informing the youth about the positive youth development activities he would complete soon: the judge said, “You’re going to get involved in some exciting work in the next few steps. Your educational and job skill advances will help you surround yourself with positive people and turn from a life of crime. You really encapsulate all of those values.” In another instance, Hearing 10, the judge asked the youth to work with his Care Coordinator to plan his PYD activities to earn points toward graduation, stay busy, and connect with positive people.

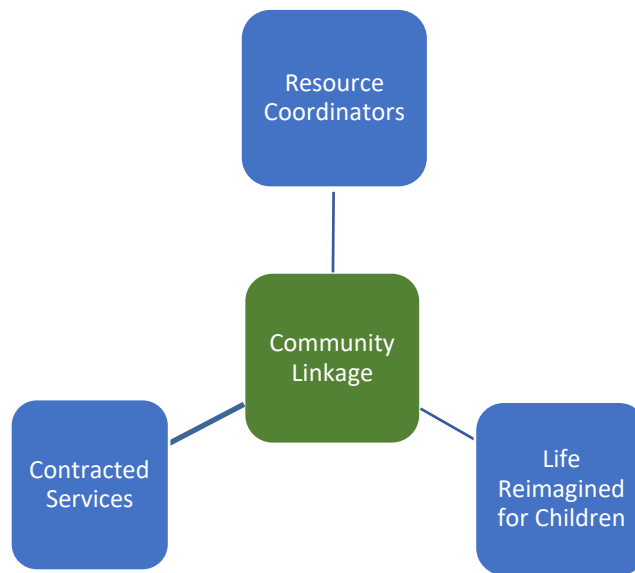
Some post-release PYD activities youth enjoy include the Boys and Girls Club, art, music, boxing, social club, athletic activities, gym, church, race and gender-specific activities, educational classes to enrich themselves, and participating with a mentor. In addition, employment is considered a PYD activity, so age-appropriate youth are encouraged to work with their care coordinator to find and maintain a job. Administrator A explained, “We work hard to get them jobs. Jobs put them in contact with positive coworkers, and it structures their day. Jobs also get them out of sitting around the house and running the streets all day.” Upon completing their PYD activities, youth receive praise and points from the court. For example, the researcher observed youth praised and rewarded with points for completing their three PYD activities during Hearings 3 and 7.

In addition to completing three PYD activities, youth must complete a community service project. SOAR administrators want youth to know they have something positive to contribute to the community. The more youth contribute, the more connected to the community they become, and the less likely they are to harm it. Administrator H explained, “Some kids feel like outsiders in their community – they feel like they don’t belong and don’t have a connection. That disconnect can make it easier to victimize someone due to a lack of empathy. Making the connection of ‘I belong. These walls are my community, so I’m not going to write on them’ is what the community service project is about.”

Youth work with their Support Team members and guardian to develop a community service project tailored to the youths’ interests. Youth plan their community service project, outline the steps, execute the project, and reflect on the experience. Reflecting on the experience helps youth internalize the feelings that surfaced upon giving back to the community along with any responses shared by the recipients of their generosity. Most youth experience an enlightening moment after they complete the project. In many cases, youth learned the cost of everyday items and began appreciating the value of money. Previous projects have included donating to a community food bank, distributing flyers for services that support people experiencing homelessness, supporting grandmother’s healthcare needs during a snowstorm, and creating and distributing care kits to people experiencing homelessness.

2.2 Positive Youth Development Evidence Rating: Strong Support

2.3 Community Linkage



SOAR envisions every youth living a prosocial life and every family being independent of the juvenile justice system. As such, there is a heavy emphasis on community connections. Travis County, which includes the booming city of Austin, Tx, is a community that is rich in resources. An essential benefit of having a local residential treatment program in Travis County is the access to local providers who can begin working with the family pre-release and continue with them post-release. The goal is to strengthen the family system and how they function before the youth returns to the community as a strategy to prevent subsequent reoffending. Administrator C explained, “Our supervision of youth will come to an end, and the youth will still need services.” Administrator E also shared, “The families need services but do not know where to look, so helping them will increase their independence.” The high level of interest to connect youth and families to the community is where resource coordinators and TCJPD’s non-profit organization, Life Reimagined for Children, step in to provide support.

Resource Coordinators

Resource coordinators specialize in vocation, employment, education, personal enrichment, housing, and other essential services, and canvas the community and build

relationships with community-based providers. These resources are shared with the Support Team members, youth, and families throughout the SOAR process. SOAR administrators placed significant importance on these roles and credited them for producing some of the program's most beneficial community connections. Life Reimagined for Children is expected to join in this network-building upon the community reopening after the pandemic.

Life Reimagined for Children

Life Reimagined for Children is a publicly supported charity that operates solely to support the mission and activities of the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department. Their mission is to enrich the lives of Travis County children involved in the juvenile justice system by imparting skills, instilling motivation, and creating opportunities beyond their current reach. They achieve this, in part, by purchasing incentives youth earn in the program. Incentives, such as gift cards, gym memberships, and food cannot be purchased using taxpayer dollars. In addition, they are creating a network of community organizations interested in serving TCJPD youth - further advancing the efforts being made by the resource coordinators. SOAR ultimately believes that the more the community steps forward, the more juvenile justice can step back.

Some pre-release connections may include job placement programs, education programs, mental health services, or public housing programs. In addition, Support Team members often link families to basic needs resources before the youth reenters the community. Post-release connections include linkages to community-based positive youth development activities, therapeutic services, and community service activities.

Contracted Services

Lastly, administrators emphasized that the department does not provide every service a family may need, so connecting the youth and family to the community is a necessary step,

regardless. For example, a youth may need outpatient substance use therapy, or the parents may need couple's therapy. In this instance, the Support Team collaborates to complete referrals on the family's behalf. Administrators also mentioned that some families have a healthy distrust of the criminal justice system, leading them to decline SOAR's assistance. In this circumstance, the Support Team members attempt to build a stronger relationship with the family with hopes that they will be more receptive at a later date. Toward the end of Phase IV, SOAR members make every effort to link families to services that can sustain them following the cease of SOAR involvement.

2.3 Community Linkage Evidence Rating: Strong Support

2.4 Continuity of Care



A continuity or continuum of care is where providers share information across systems to ensure proper management of the patient's or client's case and to increase the likelihood of a comprehensive, cohesive service plan. Providing a continuity of care increases communication, consistency, collaboration, and coordination between juvenile justice and community-based

youth treatment and enrichment services. SOAR provides this continuity through the formation of the Support Team and SOAR Reentry Court.

SOAR Formation

SOAR administrators believe providing a continuity of services is critical to reentry success. In fact, executive leadership formulated SOAR with continuity of care in mind. Pre-SOAR, youth reentering the community experienced many changes that led to a disjointed, unsupported transition back to the community. For instance, youth and families terminated the relationship with their juvenile probation officer and counselor immediately upon leaving the secure facility (the care coordinator role did not exist at the time). Asking youth to start over after building relationships for six to twelve months with their team was very difficult and detrimental because there was no relationship or established trust with the new team members. When youth switch players constantly, their trust in the system or program begins to diminish.

However, under the SOAR model, the youth and family maintain their relationships with the original counselor, juvenile probation officer, and care coordinator. SOAR also instituted one judge presiding over the hearings and serving as an executive team member in the program. Additional team members supporting the youth and family pre-and post-release include the resource coordinators, dedicated prosecutor, juvenile public defender, private attorney (when applicable), and the unit coordinator – although unit coordinators are primarily involved when youth are in residential placement.

This continuity of care from admission to program completion allows the SOAR team to be with the child and family for 12 – 18 months which offers numerous benefits. Some benefits include having a team that knows the youth's and family's strengths and challenges, and the youth and family can trust to have their best interest at heart. Administrator A remarked, "There is a shift in expectations for the child – from low-level expectations from the youth's parent or

teacher – to high-level expectations from someone who believes in them. This [faith] changes their self-esteem, and kids now believe in themselves.” Administrators are thankful the team rarely changes, and if it does, it is often just one team member, so the core team remains intact.

Service Continuation

As SOAR services reach a natural conclusion, support team members ensure service continuation with the main goal being a warm handoff of the case to community providers. Warm handoffs can occur for several reasons, including personal preference, goal attainment, or because the department does not offer the service, such as couple’s therapy or inpatient substance use treatment. Typically, support team members generate referrals to community providers to facilitate the warm handoff. However, in some cases, youth and families express interest in accessing services at a later date. In this event, support team members generate a resource contact list for future use. The goal is to ensure the family can be independent outside of the juvenile justice system.

Of the support team members, counseling is typically the first service to terminate or transition to a community provider. This is especially true after youth have demonstrated consistency in using their DBT skills, are associating with prosocial peers, and are engaging in decision-making that results in positive outcomes. Youth may request community-based therapeutic services for the same reasons as adults: to continue processing daily interactions with peers and family or set and achieve goals. A warm handoff ensures a new therapist is aware of the youth’s history, including motivational factors and triggers.

The care coordinator and juvenile probation officer remain with the youth and family until the end of the program as they work with the youth to complete the passport assignments and remain compliant with probation terms. The care coordinator typically generates referrals and facilitates service continuation throughout the reentry phase, including services for basic

needs, education programs, and employment services. However, by the end of the program, the care coordinator is monitoring the family's ability to independently access needed services instead of depending on the care coordinator for basic assistance.

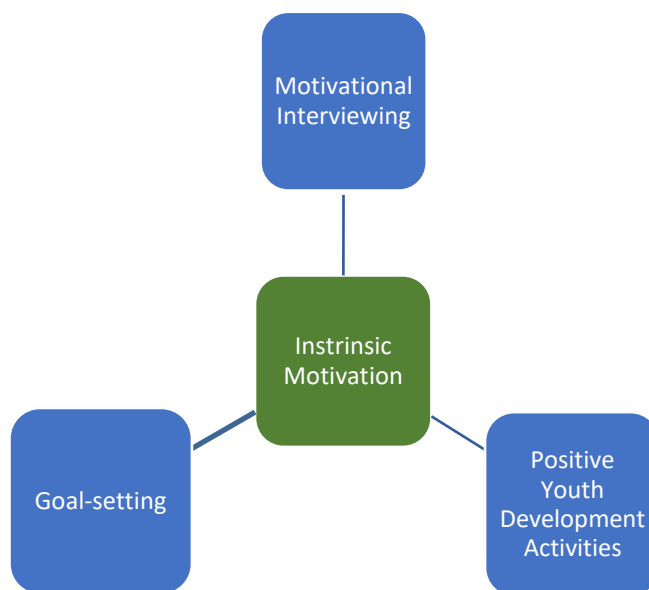
Finally, youth with a remaining probation term are transferred to lower intensity supervision upon completing the SOAR program. At this stage, youth have achieved all their reentry goals and demonstrated stability in their life which warrants less intensive supervision and departmental involvement. The SOAR probation officer transfers the case file to the new probation officer and provides a warm handoff of the youth's SOAR history to include challenges the youth experienced and gains the youth has made during treatment and reentry. This transition not only highlights the youth's personal accomplishment, but the reduced probation involvement is justified given the lower risk to reoffend. In some cases, the court may completely terminate the youth's probation because of this reduced risk.

2.4 Continuity of Care Evidence Rating: Strong Support

Case Management Overall Rating: On Target

Chapter II concluded that **Youth Motivation** is a complex concept. Contemporary literature acknowledges the importance of incentivizing success through positive reinforcement (Harvell et al., 2018), providing a workbook for goal and progress tracking (OJJDP, 2018), and balancing incentives with accountability measures. Positive reinforcement creates valuable opportunities to encourage accountability, motivate long-term positive behavior change, and promote positive youth development. Underlying operant learning theory asserts “that behavior is learned through the consequences that result from one's actions” (Skinner, 1966). In other words, youth will continue exhibiting desirable behaviors that result in positive feedback, while ceasing undesirable behaviors. SOAR excelled in this component with their efforts to generate and maintain youth motivation throughout the program.

3.1 Intrinsic Motivation



Intrinsic motivation is key to reentry success because youth who are more intrinsically motivated are usually less aggressive, exhibit fewer antisocial behaviors, and make a stronger

connection to activities that align with their values. Furthermore, since intrinsically motivated youth are more likely to engage and be responsive to interventions than those who are primarily extrinsically motivated, SOAR members' primary goal is to tap into each youth's intrinsic motivation.

Motivational Interviewing

To follow the Risk-Need-Responsivity principles and to bring about lasting behavioral changes, SOAR targets youths' internal motivation to change through Motivational Interviewing (MI). TCJPD staff is trained in MI practices to help youth identify "life worth living" goals. These are short- and long-term goals that encourage youth to change their lifestyle. As a result, youth become motivated to go to school, get viable employment, and live a healthy lifestyle. In addition, Support Team members provide encouragement and validation to help youth pursue their goals and make behavioral changes.

Additionally, motivational interviews helps youth change the way they think about themselves. Administrator D offered the example of a youth who could only think of himself as a criminal. After several rounds of motivational interviewing and counseling sessions, the youth was able to identify himself as "a young black male who is smart and can write raps." The program strives to generate, witness, and support this type of shift in youths' thinking. The judge often prompts the youth to reflect on their behaviors and experiences as a method to help youth identify the intrinsic factors that led to their shift. Motivational interviewing is an ongoing process to engage and reengage youth in their goals throughout residential treatment, during the community transition, while getting stabilized in the community, and at the completion of the SOAR program.

Positive Youth Development Activities

SOAR provides a wide variety of activities for youth during the residential and community phases of the program. Administrators not only believe these activities increase youth competencies, but they also hope youth find these prosocial activities appealing. The overall goal is for youth to feel a sense of connection to the programs and experience the feeling that results from each completion. Essentially, SOAR aims for youth to feel worthy of success and encourages youth to chase that feeling over the feeling that results from committing criminal acts. Administrator A shared, “Some kids are intrinsically motivated to maintain their freedom and not get locked up again. However, most youth get intrinsic motivation from earning a job, working, earning an income, being independent, and having a safe place to stay.” Other youth are motivated by their faith, supporting their family, or advancing their education.

Goal-setting

Administrators explained that tapping into youths’ intrinsic motivation begins with youth taking a lead role in developing their treatment and personal goals; establishing their buy-in ensures that youth become stakeholders in their success. Support Team members want to be sure the goals match the youth’s desires and are achievable, and youth want to achieve the goals they set (intrinsic motivation). Support Team members often remind youth of their goals, support youth through each step of their goals, and celebrate with youth when they achieve their goals.

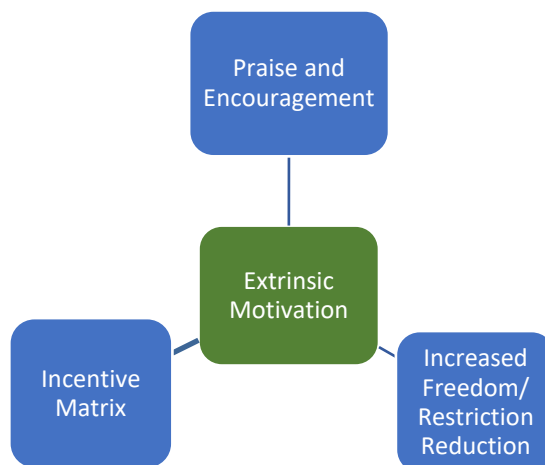
To this end, youth participate in developing each of their five to seven reentry goals included in the Phase IV Reentry Plan. Upon the court approving the plan, youth transcribe their goals into their Passport to Success workbook as they prepare for their transitional release. This strength-based tool is intended to serve as a roadmap for completing the SOAR program and probation. It breaks down the individualized Phase IV Reentry Plan into incremental steps that need to be accomplished between court appearances. This format helps youth maintain focus on

short-term, attainable goals and helps to keep them from becoming overwhelmed by the reentry process. The Passport belongs to the youth and allows them to take ownership of their journey. It also helps stimulate intrinsic motivation through reflection pages, PYD activities, and the community service project. The reentry goals are broken down into smaller, weekly tasks to help youth remain grounded in the small steps they will take in the community. Youth are provided with a new task each court appearance until the larger goal is achieved.

Administrators revealed there are times when a goal is no longer relevant, so flexibility is required. For instance, the youth wanted to attend college, but after working a full day outside in the sun, the goal to attend college became too challenging. The team discussed and processed the decision with him and changed his goal to “maintain employment throughout the reentry term”. The college goal was revisited later in his reentry process.

3.1 Intrinsic Motivation Evidence Rating: Strong Support

3.2 Extrinsic Motivation



Research provided in Chapter II encourages juvenile justice agencies to embrace the operant learning perspective by reducing focus on punishment for non-compliance and increasing focus on incentives for positive behavior. Furthermore, promoting a balanced

approach and building on youths' strengths can lead to positive reentry outcomes.

Encouragement or praise imparts confidence and strength in youth. Motivating justice-involved youth can be challenging, but the positive outcomes can be gratifying. During Phase IV-Nonsecure, SOAR youth work toward achieving their reentry goals. Some youth are intrinsically motivated to succeed and advance in life and others are motivated by the promise of a reward. Some rewards include verbal praise, increased freedoms and reduced restrictions, and rewards and incentives.

Praise and Encouragement

Praise and encouragement are the most common forms of positive reinforcement employed within the SOAR program. Youth appreciate the opportunity to receive recognition from the court and the team, which creates a cycle that could lead to feelings of accomplishment and intrinsic motivation. Administrator B explained, "Getting praise from the judge in court is very motivational for some kids. Administrator H added that often the team is "telling [the youth] how proud we are of them, validating the challenges along the way, and acknowledging the parent's efforts. Furthermore, the team encourages youth and reminds them that they are capable of achieving their goals." During Hearing 5, while sharing how proud she was of the youth's academic progress, the judge shared, "What this tells me is that you're very smart and you can do this!"

In another instance, the youth from Hearing 8 was happy that he earned his GED, was applying to community college, and hoped to earn a scholarship. He shared, "I could have been killed by now." The judge replied, "This is all good stuff! I'm so proud of everything you have achieved. When you get into the community, you're going to earn gift cards to use for yourself or your family." This praise and validation made the youth smile from ear-to-ear. In another example from Hearing 11, the judge shared, "I'm really proud of the progress you've made since

reentering the community. If you keep this up, you'll be eligible to finish the program sooner than you think." This youth seemed very happy at the prospect of finishing SOAR sooner than the estimated six months.

Increased Freedom/Restriction Reduction

When youth are released into the community, they are confined to their home for at least 30 days to ensure they are accessible to their Support Team and service providers. The program uses that first month to ensure youth transition well before taking away the structured environment youth were accustomed to in the residential facility. Youth work hard to get off home detention to reclaim their lives because these restrictions imposed on their ability to freely connect with friends and move around the community. As youth demonstrate responsibility and accountability, the Support Team recommends that the court begin to relax the conditions of transitional release. In turn, youth become motivated to achieve their goals by the promise of increased freedoms and reduced restrictions. Some of these include removing the GPS monitor, extending curfew, reducing reporting requirements, reducing hearings, graduating from the SOAR program, and terminating probation. Additionally, the reward of pending charges being dismissed has proven effective at motivating youth to complete their tasks and achieve their reentry goals.

This is evident in Hearing 14, when the judge advised the youth, "If you keep knocking your tasks out, then I'll take your GPS monitor off next week... you may be one of our early graduates." The idea of increased freedom brought a smile to the youth's face and she replied she would keep doing well in the community. Hearings 11 and 13 were similar – the Support Team recommended the youth have their monitors removed because they were finally being responsible with their freedom, compliant with probation, and maintaining good communication. This is but another example of SOAR's ability to motivate youth through the program.

Incentive Matrix

SOAR recognizes that adolescent brains are more responsive to positive reinforcement and that it serves an important role in shaping positive adolescent behavior. Incentives are an important component of behavioral management systems because they help youth learn and implement new, desired behaviors by offering youth coveted items. Upon entering the community, SOAR offers a robust incentive matrix. This strengths-based structure rewards youth as they progress through the reentry process and earn points for completing their tasks and accomplishing their goals. In turn, youth become eligible to receive pre-identified, individualized incentives of increasing value. The structure allows for youth to work towards an identifiable reward while accomplishing goals. Each point bracket corresponds to an incentive level with a predetermined dollar amount – Copper (\$10), Bronze (\$20), Silver (\$50), Gold (\$100), Platinum (\$200). In addition, youth can select gift cards from a catalog of over 50 retailers for the Silver, Gold, and Platinum incentive levels. The catalog also gives ideas on using their incentives, such as work clothing, recreational activities, and transportation. Though this positive reinforcement structure is aligned with research for promoting motivation and sustaining positive behavioral change, there is an entrenched reluctance by agencies and grantors to fund incentives.

Travis County finance regulations consider gift cards an “unallowable” expense and cannot be purchased with county funds. Therefore, the incentive matrix’s robust menu of coveted gift cards is sponsored by Life Reimagined for Children, the publicly supported charity that acts solely to support the mission and activities of the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department. Their board members meet monthly to hear the latest SOAR activities, learn about the youths’ progress, and fund the incentives. In addition, the board raises funds and earns grants to meet this objective. Given Life Reimagined for Children’s dedication to generating community connections, supporting with basic needs, and funding the incentive matrix (included in three of

the four components outlined in the preliminary model), **Nonprofit Organization Support** has emerged as a new component critical to the success of youth's reentry success.

During court observations, the researcher observed several instances of extrinsic motivating factors. First, youth can elect to receive their incentives in one lump sum or receive incentives as they earn them. For instance, during Hearing 1, the youth elected to receive incentives as he earned them to help himself "stay focused". In Hearing 2, the youth elected to receive all his incentives at the end of the program to pay for moving expenses. Both youth were happy about graduating from the program. When asked what he learned from this experience, the youth from Hearing 2 shared, "I learned you are not the person you grew up as. You are always growing as a person. I didn't believe that at first. Things change, life changes... My past does not have to define me."

In another instance, during Hearing 13, the judge said, "You had a fabulous week and earned 9 points! How do you feel about this?" The youth responded, "It actually wasn't that hard at all". The judge continued by asking the youth, "If this wasn't hard, why are you doing so well now versus before?" The youth explained that she wants to complete the program and be finished with probation. The researcher also observed a smile on her face and a sense of confidence, signifying a shift toward intrinsic motivation.

3.2 Extrinsic Motivation Evidence Rating: Strong Support

3.3 Motivational Tools



Workbooks and trackers are an informative, supportive, and essential resource for youth as they embark on their unique reentry and self-discovery journey. A youth-centric workbook demystifies the program's expectations and empowers youth and families, consequently increasing intrinsic motivation. Whether youth track SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely), court appearances, or incentive selections, workbooks serve to orient and organize youth during a critical transitional period in their lives. The overwhelming benefit of this kind of self-examination is an utmost necessity for reentry preparation. Additionally, youths' reentry success is enhanced by professionals and parents utilizing and reinforcing the benefits of the workbook and tracker.

Treatment Tracker

In SOAR, youth can track their treatment progress on a treatment tracker. The tracker breaks down the treatment goals into objective criteria. The goals and progress are evaluated closely throughout their residential stay as part of the monthly Treatment Team Meetings. Risk to re-offend, behavioral change, skill gains, and cognitive shifts are measured as a means of

determining youth progress as well as the potential need to alter treatment. Youth can review their individual and group trackers at any time. By phase 4, youth use their *Passport to Success* to track their appointments, rewards, and assignments.

Passport to Success

During Phase IV, youth receive a Passport to Success workbook, a strength-based tool designed to serve as a roadmap for completing the SOAR process and probation. It breaks down the individualized Phase IV Reentry Plan into incremental steps to be accomplished between court appearances. Administrators revealed that some youth take to the passport and some do not. The book was initially designed to be reviewed by the judge during in-person court. The judge envisioned checking their work and writing encouraging notes for the youth to read after court. Unfortunately, the pandemic impacted that vision, but some youth genuinely enjoy writing in the book and reading their reflections in virtual court. Youth with learning disabilities are encouraged to practice their writing by writing in the workbook, but they also can verbalize their reflections in court.

The researcher observed Hearing 2 where the judge praised the youth for bringing his *Passport to Success* to every hearing, including his Graduation Hearing. The youth smiled as he talked about the workbook. He commented that the passport kept him engaged and on track in the program. Initially, he did not think he would like the program, but it became the “best thing to happen” to him.

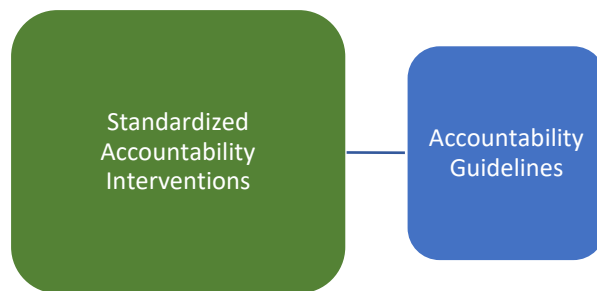
3.3 Motivational Tools Evidence Rating: Strong Support

Youth Motivation Overall Rating: On Target

Accountability Measures

Accountability Measures are essential to youth compliance, deterring recidivism, and maintaining community safety. National researchers emphasize the need for holding youth accountable, ensuring judicial fairness, considering victim impact, and preventing reoffending. Standardized response systems have demonstrated an increase in compliance with supervision conditions. The fair application of these responses is essential to promoting procedural justice and decreasing the likelihood of reoffending.

4.1 Standardized Accountability Interventions



Accountability Guidelines

All SOAR administrators emphasized the importance of holding youth accountable to the program expectations, probation rules, and youths' individual goals. While the court generally serves as the pillar of accountability for youth, parents, and program staff, SOAR administrators designed an Accountability Guidelines tool to offer a set of responses to the everyday

compliance issues youth face. Written in an “If...Then” format, the document outlines responses to low, moderate, and high concern violations. Furthermore, the document provides consistent language the multidisciplinary team can use to inform youth of potential consequences for their behaviors and hold them accountable should those behaviors persist.

Administrator B explained, “Accountability Guidelines offer consistency and objectivity. This is important to give guidance to the team and offer consistency on how to navigate challenges... Due to racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice, this type of guideline gives officers something tangible to use regardless of the youth’s race or ethnicity.” Administrator D added, “Youth benefit from structure. They already suffer from trauma and mental health needs. Youth can better navigate their emotions if they have an understanding of a potential consequence.” Administrator D continued by explaining the importance of objective criteria when building relationships. Youth believing the system is subjective could impact their behaviors and even spill over into the relationship with the parent because the program needs the youth to trust the process.

Most administrators suggested that the Accountability Guidelines document was designed for internal use, and the document has not been translated into a youth-friendly format. Moreover, while administrators believe the document's contents are discussed with youth as behavioral concerns arise, administrators could not confirm these discussions were happening consistently. However, court observations reflected consistency from the team and judge, at least within the courtroom.

During Hearing 7, the team expressed concerns regarding the youth’s probation violations, including removing the GPS monitor, spending the weekend away from home, and lack of communication with her stakeholders. The team wanted the court to reiterate the consequences of such behavior. The judge informed the youth, mother, and team that a Directive

to Apprehend (DTA) would be issued for the youth if a similar event occurs in the future. In another instance, during Hearing 10, the judge attempted to understand the cause of the youth's non-compliance with home detention and GPS monitoring. After receiving unsatisfactory responses from the youth, the judge expressed her disappointment with the youth's actions over the weeks. The judge reiterated her expectations that the youth is only allowed to be at home and work, then finished her statement with, "You either comply with your conditions, or I'll pick you up and put you back in detention." The youth straightened his posture and agreed by stating, "Yes, ma'am".

(In these instances, the researcher could not confirm if the team implemented standardized accountability interventions from the Accountability Guidelines, or if the youths' behaviors were only being addressed in court.)

4.1 Standardized Accountability Interventions Evidence Rating: Adequate Support

4.2 Fairness



Objectivity and Responsivity

Advancement through each SOAR phase and incentive level relies on the completion of very concrete, tangible tasks. As a result, all youth have the same number of points to achieve, requirements for the program, and access to incentives. A formal incentive structure can also help neutralize unconscious bias. Points-based rewards systems allow teams to increase their ability to respond to wanted compliance in a quick, fair, and consistent way. The youth's advancement is always shared in an open forum with the youth, family, and attorneys to ensure transparency in decision-making. Furthermore, adhering to the Responsivity principle, goals and tasks are tailor-fitted to meet the families where they are. Administrator F shared, "Everyone's integrity is at stake if we're not treating youth and families fairly and meeting them where they're at."

Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force

The Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's executive leadership launched a new initiative, known as the Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force, to identify and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities within juvenile justice and reentry efforts. The task force plans to achieve this goal by analyzing data, modifying and developing policies, and ushering in professional development training around implicit bias. These changes throughout the department are expected to impact youth within the SOAR program directly.

4.2 Fairness Evidence Rating: Adequate Support

4.3 Restorative Justice Approaches



The literature is clear about restorative justice approaches restoring the trust between youth and their victims, including the community, by allowing victims to be heard and youth to take responsibility for their actions. Restorative justice practices design interactions to be intentionally non-adversarial and to encourage youth accountability, victim empowerment, and community engagement. SOAR defines restorative justice as trying to create a system response that is both healing for the offender and their victims. Though SOAR is restorative to the youth, and the community in some ways, administrators admit the victim is not considered within the program design.

General Requirements

Some general requirements of SOAR include youth writing an apology letter to the victim accepting responsibility for their behavior. In addition, the youth earns points toward their incentive levels and community service hours toward the 40-hour requirement. Youth are also ordered to pay restitution to their victims. Youth can participate in a program (Pot of Gold) to complete community service hours to equate to restitution payments of up to \$350 per victim.

SOAR administrators repeatedly mentioned that the program could strengthen this area to ensure youth learn to have empathy for their victims to prevent subsequent offenses and revictimization (recidivism).

SOAR's Mission

Most SOAR administrators believe rehabilitating the youth serves to heal the community harmed by the youth's offense. Juveniles are considered children and are in a separate justice system to receive individualized services that contribute to their rehabilitation. Administrator C shared, "Kids need training and education, not condemnation if we want to see them become better citizens." The program's objective is to address the holistic needs of the youth. From a community standpoint, youth having a job, being productive citizens, and giving back to the community through their community service project contributes to the community healing outlined by scholars. Furthermore, reformed youth contribute to people feeling safe in the community.

The community service project gives back to the community and requires youth to reflect on their impact on the community. Administrators shared examples where youth expressed being less likely to harm the community because they have contributed to beautifying that community or helping those who live within the community. Administrator G shared an example of a SOAR youth creating care packages to distribute to those experiencing homelessness. This community service project was a significant event for the youth because he saw people less fortunate than himself, and he wanted to help ease their suffering. The youth shared that this was an influential moment because he realized he took things for granted and things could be worse. The youth

began appreciating his family and no longer wanted to let his family down; instead, he wanted them to be proud of him.

4.3 Restorative Justice Practices Evidence Rating: Limited Support

Accountability Measures Overall Rating: Some Improvement Needed

Figure 5.1 Research Findings

Summary of Findings		
Component	Method	Evidence Rating
1. Parent Engagement and Support		
1.1 Peer Partner Support	• Administrator Interview	• Adequate Support
1.2 Basic Needs Support	• Administrator Interview	• Strong Support
1.3 Family Therapeutic Services	• Administrator Interview	• Strong Support
1.4 Court Engagement	• Administrator Interview • Direct Observation	• Strong Support • Strong Support
1.5 Transition Planning	• Administrator Interview • Direct Observation	• Adequate Support
Overall Assessment 1		Some Improvement Needed
2. Case Management		
2.1 Wraparound Services	• Administrator Interview	• Strong Support
2.2 Positive Youth Development	• Administrator Interview • Direct Observation	• Strong Support • Strong Support
2.3 Community Linkage	• Administrator Interview	• Strong Support
2.5 Continuity of Care	• Administrator Interview	• Strong Support
Overall Assessment 2		On Target
3. Youth Motivation		
3.1 Intrinsic Motivation	• Administrator Interview	• Strong Support • Strong Support
3.2 Extrinsic Motivation	• Administrator Interview • Direct Observation	• Strong Support • Strong Support
3.3 Motivational Tools	• Administrator Interview • Direct Observation	• Adequate Support • Adequate Support
Overall Assessment 3		On Target
4. Accountability Measures		
4.1 Standardized Interventions	• Administrator Interview • Direct Observation	• Adequate Support • Limited Support
4.2 Fairness	• Administrator Interview	• Adequate Support
4.3 Restorative Justice Approaches	• Administrator Interview	• Limited Support
Overall Assessment 4		Some Improvement Needed
Overall assessment for evidence of SOAR Reentry Court's alignment with the practical ideal type model of an effective reentry strategy – Some Improvement Needed		

Chapter Summary

The administrator interviews and court observations concluded that SOAR's components mostly aligned with the preliminary model. However, with strengthening subcomponents under **Parent Engagement and Support** and **Accountability Measures**, SOAR's foundational elements would be wholly grounded in the literature. Further, the data collected paints a picture of SOAR's many strengths, including judicial involvement, the incentive structure, dedication to fairness and positive youth development, and access to nonprofit organization support. Consequently, **Nonprofit Organization Support** emerged as a new component in a comprehensive youth reentry and reintegration strategy. This new component is critical to reentry success due to its function in building community networks, supporting with basic needs, and funding the incentive matrix, which is necessary for three of the four components (Parent Engagement and Support, Case Management, and Youth Motivation) to be successful. The implications of these results will be discussed in the Conclusion chapter.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This research focused on maximizing the effectiveness and outcomes of juvenile reentry and reintegration by compiling components that comprise an ideal model for a juvenile reentry and reintegration strategy serving the target population. Next, a case study was conducted on the Travis County Juvenile Probation Department's "Strengthening Opportunities for Achieving Reentry" (SOAR) Reentry Court program – comparing SOAR's program components against the literature's components. SOAR's program administrators gave input via focused interviews about the structure and makeup of their program. Additionally, direct observations were conducted of SOAR court hearings to witness the use of these strategies. Next, the data gathered was analyzed and recorded in the previous chapter. Finally, this chapter discusses the implications of the findings and is organized into sections for research contributions, important findings, recommendations, study limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Contributions to Research

This research aims to contribute to efforts to formalize a juvenile reentry and reintegration model for the target population. Reentry and reintegration services are vital elements to reducing recidivism, so the strategy must effectively produce positive outcomes for youth and families. Therefore, the researcher set out to determine what components comprise a reentry and reintegration strategy according to the practical and empirical literature.

The components identified in the preliminary model include **Parent Engagement and Support, Case Management, Youth Motivation, and Accountability Measures**. A fifth component, **Nonprofit Organization Support**, emerged during the administrator interviews. Most juvenile probation departments grapple with funding programs, and this new component, along with grant opportunities, could be a solution to achieve the full scope of the juvenile

reentry model. Agencies are encouraged to modify the components according to their organization and population's needs to implement them to maximize the program's impact.

State agencies can also benefit from the research by referring to the refined model when designing or enhancing juvenile reentry and reintegration programs. Administrators who oversee programs that currently exist can review the model's components to identify areas of strength and areas that could benefit from improvement. They can use this research to advocate for additional support services and resources, whether on the local, state, or federal levels of government. The model is broad enough that entities can tailor it to fit their program's parameters.

Key Findings

The early literature review process uncovered evidence-based practices utilized in the juvenile justice industry to increase positive outcomes and reduce recidivism. The researcher compiled all of the essential elements into one model. As the administrator interview and court observation data was compiled, patterns began to emerge, highlighting the components most aligned with the literature. The key findings center around whether the components that make up SOAR's reentry and reintegration strategy align or do not align with the components in the preliminary model.

Parent Engagement and Support

SOAR performed adequately within the **Parent Engagement and Support** component, with two subcomponents recommended for strengthening. The first subcomponent is Peer Partner Support. SOAR offers families the option to receive a comprehensive list of services from a family partner. However, due to its infancy, SOAR lacks the infrastructure for parents to

receive assistance from a peer with lived experience, as recommended by the literature. For that reason, SOAR earned Adequate Support in the Peer Partner Support subcomponent.

The research results suggest that SOAR offers various options to support families with basic needs, including assistance from the family partner, care coordinator, and resource coordinators. Additionally, SOAR has a nonprofit organization, Life Reimagined for Children, supporting purchasing items that county funds do not cover. Also, the family is supported throughout the program, which can total 12-18 months, and by far exceeds efforts in many jurisdictions. Overall, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Basic Needs Support subcomponent.

SOAR offers a wide variety of family therapeutic services to improve the family dynamics between the youth and family. With the youth-parent relationship being vital to the youth's success in the program and life, offering a robust menu of activities like family counseling, parent DBT groups, individual youth counseling, and funding parents as they participate in counseling goes a long way toward rehabilitating the youth. Overall, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Family Therapeutic Services subcomponent.

Court and program engagement are additionally essential elements for the youth's success. SOAR offers the family various ways to participate in court, including by phone, virtually, or via their family partner. Court observations revealed a high level of engagement from the parent and soliciting their input before the judge makes a decision. As a result, the court truly sees the parent as a partner, and for this reason, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Court Engagement subcomponent.

Finally, transition planning is considered instrumental in any reentry and reintegration strategy. The parent's input, buy-in, and support along the way are essential to long-term success for the youth. SOAR offers parents an opportunity to give input during individual discussions, formal Transition Meetings, and court hearings. However, the program lacked significant opportunities for the parent to contribute to the youth's treatment plans. This was an area SOAR

earned an Adequate Support rating. Overall, SOAR performed adequately in the **Parent Engagement and Support** category. The overall rating was **Some Improvement Needed**.

Case Management

The researcher analyzed the **Case Management** component. The SOAR program's formulation is heavily rooted in evidence-based practices, including wraparound services. While SOAR does not follow the fidelity of a national wraparound service that primarily serves youth in the community, SOAR's version of wraparound meets the needs of youth being served in a secure placement and the community. In addition, youth and parents receive these support services from the program throughout the 12-18-month duration. For these reasons, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Wraparound Services subcomponent.

An emerging body of evidence suggests that juvenile justice agencies focus on positive youth development as an indicator of success. SOAR's robust menu of positive youth development activities, the requirement for youth to complete three activities, and the court's engagement around these activities have indeed demonstrated SOAR's commitment to this subcomponent. In addition, court observations showed the benefits youth experienced by participating in these activities, including feeling proud of themselves and shifting toward living a prosocial life. As a result, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Positive Youth Development subcomponent.

SOAR's foundation is rooted in community partnerships, engagement, and linkages. Travis County is a resource-rich community with a strong interest in investing in the rehabilitation of justice-involved youth. The wide variety of service and program options allows Support Teams to individualize each youth's reentry plan according to the youth's interests. Furthermore, by matching youth and families with services that satisfy their individual and

specific needs, youth are less likely to re-offend. SOAR prioritizes community linkages while in residential placement, during the transition stage, throughout the community phase, and before graduation. Another Strong Support was earned in the Community Linkage subcomponent.

Finally, administrators formulated SOAR with continuity of care in mind. The judge, juvenile probation officer, care coordinator, counselor, unit coordinator, and resource coordinators support the youth from admission to program graduation, with some professionals naturally terminating contact as youth demonstrate stability in the community. Trust, understanding, and consistency are built with youth and families, which seems to lead to significant outcomes for youth. SOAR's emphasis and dedication to the pillar of the program are by far beyond what most jurisdictions offer. For these reasons, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Continuity of Care subcomponent. Overall, SOAR earned **On Target** in the **Case Management** component.

Youth Motivation

The complexity around **Youth Motivation** can lead to an ad hoc approach when rewarding positive behavior. SOAR employs Motivational Interviewing to tap into youth's intrinsic motivation while offering various extrinsic motivating factors to reward their efforts. Evidence generated from administrator interviews and court observations demonstrated the program's commitment to youth motivation and buy-in. Youth develop their own reentry goals, are considered a partner on the team, and are exposed to various positive youth development activities to spark curiosity and interest. As a result, SOAR earned Strong Support for the Intrinsic Motivation subcomponent.

SOAR's extrinsic motivating factors are unmatched. In addition to the traditional practices of using praise, encouragement, and increased freedoms, SOAR offers a supreme incentive structure that allows youth to earn almost \$400 worth of gift cards. In addition, the researcher observed the joy youth experienced when the judge and team awarded points for tasks they completed. Funded by TCJPD's nonprofit, Life Reimagined for Children, the incentive matrix is a key staple in SOAR's success and should be imitated. For these reasons, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Extrinsic Motivation subcomponent.

SOAR also prevailed with motivational tools. Rarely are youth seen as a partner in any program, let alone a government-issued program. The notion that youth can track their progress and lead their success is what the research identified as progressive and aligned with positive reentry outcomes. The court and Support Team often mention the treatment tracker and *Passport to Success*. Youth become familiar with using these tools and are then expected to know where they are within the process. Youth understanding how near they are to achieving a new level or phase can result in significant behavior modification implications. As a result, SOAR earned Strong Support in the Motivational Tools subcomponent. Overall, SOAR earned an **On Target** rating in the **Youth Motivation** component.

Accountability Measures

SOAR has room for improvement in the **Accountability Measures** component. SOAR has a set of standardized interventions known as Accountability Guidelines. SOAR's Accountability Guidelines were mentioned in the administrator interviews but were not as present in the court observations. Still, it was apparent to the researcher that the administrators understood the purpose of having such a tool based on their comments about producing fairness through objectivity. However, it was SOAR's court that truly emerged as a pillar of

accountability. For these reasons, SOAR earned Adequate Support in the Standardized Interventions subcomponent.

Next, in the Fairness subcomponent, the researcher learned the department is taking steps to increase fairness by evaluating its policies and practices to uncover implicit bias. Additionally, SOAR generates fairness by using two standardized tools to outline and track progress – treatment tracker and *Passport to Success* and adhering to the Responsivity principle. With SOAR being in its infancy, administrators are encouraged to assess the policies and practices that directly and indirectly produce racial, ethnic, gender, religious, or sexual orientation bias. Furthermore, receiving direct feedback from youth and families about the perception of fairness can lead to greater insight. Additionally, SOAR is encouraged to assess their hiring practices and employee demographics to ensure diversity amongst their youth-facing workforce. Nevertheless, SOAR earned Adequate Support in the Fairness subcomponent.

Finally, SOAR has room for improvement with its restorative justice approaches. Administrators highlighted the youth's rehabilitation and community service project as examples for restorative justice. While these elements are beneficial to the youth and community, it misses what scholars consider to be a restorative justice practice that directly benefits the victim. Restorative justice practices have proven effective with youth accountability and empathy, which reduces recidivism. As a result, SOAR earned Limited Support in the Restorative Justice Approaches subcomponent and an overall **Some Improvement Needed** in the **Accountability Measures** component.

Recommendations

Insight into the trends and common approaches used by juvenile justice entities around the country were revealed during the practical and empirical literature review. These trends and common approaches led to a set of recommendations for SOAR administrator consideration

when strengthening the alignment between SOAR and the literature. The recommendations center around subcomponents: formalize peer partner support, increase structured opportunities for parent involvement throughout treatment, translate consequences and interventions into youth-friendly language, assess SOAR's policies and practices to uncover any implicit bias that may exist, and strengthen restorative justice approaches, as reflected in Table 6.1. Furthermore, conducting frequent program evaluations would be the logical next step.

Formalize Peer Partner Support

Chapter II concluded that parents feel more supported when paired with a peer partner who is equipped to help them navigate the juvenile justice system. In SOAR's case, a peer partner, or peer-to-peer support, is defined as a parent with experience navigating the SOAR program or serving as a resource for new parents in the SOAR program. Administrator interviews concluded that SOAR does not currently offer peer-to-peer supports for parents navigating the SOAR program primarily due to the program's infancy and the coronavirus pandemic. Recommendations include:

- Develop a parent partner program that incentivizes current SOAR parents to engage with former SOAR parents. Former SOAR parents could be offered a stipend, part-time, or full-time position to serve in this role. Activities could include an orientation to SOAR, support group meetings, resources, and more.
- The Juvenile Justice 101 model helps parents navigate the juvenile justice system, provides resource booklets and scripted orientations, offers one-on-one appointments to answer questions in four key areas: information about the court, interacting effectively with the court, reassurance and support, and linkages to community resources.
- Since SOAR's family partners are responsible for coordinating services for the family, administrators should consider hiring one peer partner to facilitate orientations and help

parents buy into the program. In turn, parents may be more willing to accept the services, especially when a peer outlines their benefits.

Increase Structured Opportunities for Parent Involvement Throughout Treatment

Transition planning is considered instrumental in any reentry and reintegration strategy. The parent's input, buy-in, and support along the way are essential to long-term success for the youth. SOAR provides parents an opportunity to give input during individual discussions, formal Transition Meetings, and court hearings. However, the program lacked significant opportunities for the parent to contribute to the youth's treatment plans during the residential placement.

Recommendations include:

- SOAR parents are willing to participate in the intense court hearing schedule during Phase IV, suggesting they would be willing to attend three to four formal meetings while the youth is still in the residential placement. Administrators are encouraged to structure Treatment Team Meetings at critical treatment milestones that parents can attend to hear the youth's progress, share their perspective on treatment goals, and learn of any other plans that may be in the works. This meeting would serve as a progress review while also preparing youth and parents for the tone of the Transition Meeting.

Translate Standardized Interventions into Youth-Friendly Language

Most administrators suggested that the Accountability Guidelines document was designed for internal use and had not been translated into a youth-friendly format. There was also uncertainty in whether its contents were being discussed with youth. Practitioners propose designing workbooks that are multi-dimensional: full of practical information, meaningful exercises, engaging activities, fun illustrations, and even inspiring stories. Recommendations include:

- Produce probation-focused pages in the *Passport to Success* workbook dedicated to the youth's transitional release and probation rules. Keeping with the traveling theme, the pages can be titled **Rules of the Road** and youth can transcribe the conditions of their transitional release. The juvenile probation officer could review these pages before the transitional release.
- Demystify the consequences that result from probation violations by outlining the consequences in a *Passport* section titled **Travel Restrictions**. Again, the juvenile probation officer could review these pages before the transitional release.
- Require reflection if youth experience probation violations during their transitional release. This section of the *Passport* could be titled **Rest Stops**. At the Graduation Hearing, youth can reflect on the Rest Stops/challenges they experienced throughout their SOAR journey and discuss how it feels to overcome them.

Assess SOAR Policies and Practices to Uncover Any Implicit Bias That May Exist

TCJPD is taking steps to increase fairness by evaluating its policies and practices to uncover implicit bias. With SOAR being in its infancy, administrators are encouraged to assess the policies and practices that directly and indirectly produce racial, ethnic, gender, religious, or sexual orientation bias. Furthermore, receiving direct feedback from youth and families about the perception of fairness can lead to greater insight. Along with evaluating hiring practices and personnel makeup to ensure diversity amongst youth-facing workforce. Recommendations include:

- Assign a workgroup within the Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force to closely look at SOAR's policies and practices, especially while it is in its infancy stage and undergoing other modifications. Workgroup members should analyze data and interview staff to generate a comprehensive report and set of recommendations. SOAR

administrators should work diligently to implement the recommendations to prevent unnecessary adverse outcomes for youth in a particular social group.

- Review hiring practices to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workforce – especially youth-facing staff. Diversity of the team's racial makeup, opinions, and experiences contribute to providing fairness in the SOAR program and TCJPD in general. For instance, utilizing bilingual staff who speak in the youth's native language can increase comprehension and youth outcomes.

Strengthen Restorative Justice Approaches

The literature is clear about restorative justice approaches restoring the trust between youth and their victims by allowing victims to be heard and youth to take responsibility for their actions. Restorative justice practices design interactions to be intentionally non-adversarial and to encourage youth accountability, victim empowerment, and community engagement. SOAR has room for improvement with its restorative justice approaches. Administrators highlighted the youth's rehabilitation and community service project as examples for restorative justice. While these elements are beneficial to the youth and community, it misses what scholars consider to be a restorative justice practice that directly benefits the victim. Recommendations include:

- Consider the case study on Oregon's Governor's Task Force on Juvenile Crime. The analysis demonstrates that no treatment program (nor reentry program) can adequately honor the youth's welfare or public safety without personal accountability. SOAR administrators are encouraged to connect with an evidence-based restorative justice organization to tailor appropriate interventions into the SOAR program. Seek youth and staff input before implementing.

Conduct Frequent Program Evaluations

Program evaluation is the final essential component of a healthy, thriving reentry program due to its ability to help agencies ensure the program is accomplishing its mission and making the intended impact. Collecting, analyzing, and reporting reentry data is identified as key to measuring the effectiveness of reentry services (Godfrey, 2019). Agencies are encouraged to seek feedback from youth, parents, staff, and community stakeholders to supply the required justification to modify activities where needed, maintain successful practices, and grow in new areas. Programs can gather data from surveys, interviews, town hall meetings, and community advisory groups (Godfrey, 2019) for a qualitative approach. Similarly, quantitative performance measurement data can also be collected to track the number of youth served, completions, attendance, and more. Simultaneously, regular opportunities for review and reflection can inspire the program to celebrate its achievements and identify, acknowledge, and learn from its mistakes.

Figure 6.1 Research Findings and Recommendations

Summary of Findings and Recommendations		
Component	Evidence Rating	Recommendations
5. Parent Engagement and Support		
1.1 Peer Partner Support	Adequate Support	Needed in this area: Meaningful, consistent opportunities for peer-to-peer support.
1.2 Basic Needs Support	Strong Support	Continue current practices
1.3 Family Therapeutic Services	Strong Support	Continue current practices
1.4 Court Engagement	Strong Support	Continue current practices
5.5 Transition Planning	Adequate Support	Needed in this area: Structured opportunities for parent voice to be incorporated during the residential treatment process.
Overall Assessment 1	Some Improvement Needed	Needed in this area: Meaningful opportunities for consistent peer-to-peer support, unassociated with the department. Also, opportunities for direct parent involvement during the residential treatment period.

6. Case Management		
2.1 Wraparound Services	Strong Support	Continue current practices
2.2 Positive Youth Development	Strong Support	Continue current practices
2.3 Community Linkage	Strong Support	Continue current practices
2.6 Continuity of Care	Strong Support	Continue current practices
Overall Assessment 2	On Target	Continue current practices
7. Youth Motivation		
3.1 Intrinsic Motivation	Strong Support	Continue current practices
3.2 Extrinsic Motivation	Strong Support	Continue current practices
3.3 Motivational Tools	Strong Support	Continue current practices
Overall Assessment 3	On Target	Continue current practices
8. Accountability Measures		
4.1 Standardized Interventions	Adequate Support	Needed in this area: Youth-centric language around these expectations and reflection pages in the <i>Passport to Success</i> .
4.2 Fairness	Adequate Support	Needed in this area: Policy and practice evaluation to uncover implicit bias. Review of hiring practices to ensure diversity amongst youth-facing staff.
4.3 Restorative Justice Approaches	Limited Support	Needed in this area: Implementation of tailored restorative justice approaches that align with the current SOAR model.
Overall Assessment 4	Some Improvement Needed	Needed in this area: Youth-centric language around these expectations and reflection pages in the <i>Passport to Success</i>, a policy and practice evaluation to uncover any bias, and tailored restorative justice approaches that align with the current SOAR model.
Overall assessment for evidence of SOAR Reentry Court's alignment with the practical ideal type model of an effective reentry strategy – Some Improvement Needed		

Limitations

The information gathered from the administrator interviews and court observations were valuable to understand how the SOAR program worked from an outsider's perspective. However, being an employee of Travis County Juvenile Probation and the Program Administrator for the program could have created biases within the researcher's assessments. Furthermore, SOAR administrators could have omitted or provided information due to the

researcher's position within the program. Additionally, the research did not contain youth or parent input via interviews or surveys. Youth and parent interviews are an essential subset of data that could reveal if they receive the services as intended and if they truly want the services as designed. Finally, SOAR is in its infancy and underwent several rounds of modifications during the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in poor service delivery due to working in a remote setting.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further study is recommended to continue refining components of an effective juvenile reentry and reintegration strategy, particularly studying reentry programs administered during the pandemic. The pandemic created several logistical challenges for justice agencies and families alike. Taking a deeper dive into the modifications made during this time could provide useful practices that could be permanently adopted, such as virtual court. Also, TCJPD is encouraged to keep the momentum going and provide a more comprehensive perspective on SOAR's impact by supplementing this research with youth and parent interviews.

Additional research suggestions include comparing SOAR against national reentry outcomes or jurisdictions with similar population characteristics. SOAR administrators could also benefit from a longitudinal study comparing SOAR outcomes by gender, age, race and ethnicity, and income. Finally, to increase incentive resources, researchers are encouraged to conduct qualitative studies on youth outcomes based on incentive distribution frequency and value intervals.

Conclusion

The stakes are high for justice-involved youth reentering and reintegrating back to the community from a secure placement. While youth confinement rates have declined considerably over the last ten years, the development of comprehensive approaches for reducing recidivism remains challenging for most agencies. Statistics published across the country suggest that more

than half of youth are rearrested or reincarcerated within two years of being discharged from placement (The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2017). Individual treatment programs certainly help curtail behaviors that lead to reoffending; however, the lack of a comprehensive system leads to reoffending.

This research draws heavily upon the United States Department of Justice's 2004 publication "Implementing Evidence-Based Practice in Community Corrections: The Principles of Effective Intervention," but modernizes the strategy by including research on positive youth development and motivational tools. In turn, juvenile justice agencies are urged to frequently evaluate the effectiveness of their juvenile reentry strategy and consider implementing components offered in this study. Starting small, then frequently assessing and refining the strategy, can lead to long-term improvements. Youth count on programs like SOAR to challenge, support, motivate, and guide them. Not only does this help break the offense cycle for youth, but it also helps to break generational delinquency that may have existed before the youth.

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