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Strategies for Enhancing Programming in Local Juvenile Courts: Logic Models and Quality Assurance Procedures

David A. Julian
Keli Bussell
Ryan Kapa
Alexis Little
Scott Renshaw
Melissa Ross¹

The authors provide a case-study related to a recent project using program logic models as a primary component in the implementation of a formal quality assurance process in a local juvenile court. Program logic models illustrate the evolution of court personnel's thoughts about how best to conceptualize programming. Juvenile court officials are developing and implementing formal "quality assurance" procedures to allow for ongoing planning and program development. The authors argue that quality assurance procedures hold great promise for assuring that juvenile court programming is efficient and effective and serves the needs of local communities.

There is much interest regarding delinquent behavior and reform of the juvenile justice system. In contrast to a focus on punishment, current theories place emphasis on programming designed to address the underlying issues that predispose youth to contact with the juvenile justice system (Vitopoulos, Peterson-Badali & Skilling, 2012). This article provides a case study of one juvenile court's efforts to implement a comprehensive "quality assurance" program designed to provide data and procedures sufficient to assess the degree to which court programming achieves desired outcomes. In the following paragraphs, the authors describe theoretical perspectives related to juvenile court interventions, the concept of quality assurance and summarize court procedures and results of the case-study. Finally, the authors discuss the implications of findings relative to juvenile court operations in general.

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES RELATED TO JUVENILE COURT INTERVENTIONS

Retributive Punishment

Retributive models have been recognized as the most punitive approach to intervention with juvenile offenders and were adopted in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to a rise in juvenile crime (Bazemore & Umbreit, 1995). Retributive approaches were appealing because rule breakers get what they deserve. Punishment, rather than rehabilitation, was the primary goal of retributive justice approaches with little regard paid to why juveniles committed offenses. This is a critical point as many studies found that significant numbers of juveniles in the juvenile justice system experienced trauma throughout their childhoods and adolescence (Abram, Teplin, Charles, Longworth, McClelland & Delcan, 2004).

For example, a number of researchers have suggested that rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in juvenile justice involved youth represent a significant issue (Abram, Teplin, Charles, Longworth, McClelland & Delcan, 2004; Adams, 2010; Kerig, Ford & Olafson, 2014). Evaluation has also indicated that a significant number of juvenile justice involved youth suffer from mental health challenges. For example, investigators noted that youth who have multiple exposures to violence or victimization are at higher risk for mental health problems and/or delinquent behaviors (Buffington, Dierkhising & Marsh, 2010; Schneider, Grilli & Schneider, 2013). Finally, Bazemore and Umbreit (1995) suggested that a retributive orientation was associated with increased incarceration and longer stays in detention facilities and limited consideration of less expensive and harmful responses to youth crime.

Individual Treatment

In response to such observations, increased reliance on the individual treatment model emerged. It was true that the individual treatment approach addressed shortcomings in the retributive model by addressing underlying factors. However, Bazemore and Day (1996) suggested that this approach relied on facilities, treatment programs and services of professional experts. Furthermore, juvenile court personnel who adopted this approach typically excluded victims and other community members from significant roles in sanctioning, rehabilitation and/or promoting public safety (Bazemore & Day, 1996). In both the retributive and individual treatment approaches, the offender acted in a passive capacity and received treatment with little regard for the victim.

Restorative Justice

Buffington et al., (2010, p. 2) claim that the juvenile justice system is at a juncture and must reassess institutional responsibility to “protect society, safeguard the youth and families that come to its attention and hold delinquent youth accountable while supporting their rehabilitation.” This perspective leads directly to restorative approaches, a third type of intervention for addressing juvenile crime (Development Services Group, 2010). The goals of restorative justice are to bring together the offender, victim and community members to repair harms resulting from juvenile crime (Bazemore, 1998; Bergseth & Bouffard, 2007). From this point of view, juvenile crime is more than an act against the state, it is an offense against another person in the perpetrator’s community. The offender is responsible for her/his actions and making reparations.

Such approaches emphasize involving youth in roles that facilitate relationships with pro-social adults (Bazemore & Day, 2005). Many juvenile courts are steadily integrating restorative practices into programming and taking steps to evaluate the success of those endeavors. According to Bazemore and Day (1996), restorative justice approaches generally involve three components: assuring public safety, promoting offender accountability to their victims and assuring measurable offender gains in educational, vocational and other competencies consistent with positive youth development. In a review of multiple studies, Bergseth and Bouffard (2007) suggest that juveniles participating in restorative programming showed better results than juveniles participating in traditional court services.

Positive Youth Development

Benson, Scales, Hamilton and Sema (2006) define positive youth development as an umbrella term that encompasses theory, research, policy and practice. The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (2019), a partnership of 21 federal agencies, defines positive youth development in terms of a formal and intentional approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups and families in a productive and constructive manner that recognizes, utilizes and enhances young people's strengths and promotes positive outcomes. Theorists suggest that all youth have the capacity to be part of pro-social relationships that promote positive youth development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sema, 2006; Catalano, Hawkins, Bergland, Pollard & Arthur, 2002; Catalano, Bergland, Ryan, Lonczak & Hawkins, 1998; Developmental Services Group, 2014). Evidence suggests that positive youth development has the potential to address what are referred to as the 5 Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character and caring (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittan, Lerner & Lerner, 2010; Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Gestsdottir & et al., 2005).

Several authors have addressed the implementation of specific positive youth development programs in the context of juvenile courts (Butts, Bazemore & Meroe, 2010; Butts, Mayer & Ruth, 2005; Mears & Travis, 2004). Butts, Bazemore and Meroe (2010) identify programming that focuses on producing community art, promoting workforce development, developing outdoor and physical activity skills and promoting healthy living as vehicles for promoting positive youth development. These authors point to six domains of practice including work, education, relationships, community, health and creativity. In addition, several prominent policy groups have touted the potential of positive youth development approaches to address issues related to juvenile crime. Catalano, Bergland, Ryan, Lonczak and Hawkins (1998) identified positive youth development programs that resulted in beneficial youth behavior outcomes and preventing problem behaviors.

THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN LOCAL JUVENILE COURTS

Organizational change consistent with the approaches described above is a complex and resource intensive process. Experience suggests that many local and state efforts are focused on measurement and sharing of performance data within juvenile justice organizations in the interests of promoting quality programming (Mears & Butts, 2008). Although this demonstrates an increased interest and understanding, there is little empirical research related to the

development and utilization of quality assurance procedures within juvenile courts. It can be argued that juvenile courts seeking to improve services might adopt formal quality assurance practices that integrate data into decision making and constantly re-evaluate their results (Kurlychek, Torbet & Bozynski, 1999). Further, juvenile court judges and court personnel must use data to ensure that youth are referred to evidence-based programs aimed at preventing recidivism and supporting positive outcomes. Additionally, court personnel must identify areas of potential improvement, implement changes and measure whether they are successful (Deal & Wachter, 2017). The premise of this paper is that following such principles allows for accountability within a guided practice of quality assurance and careful collection and examination of data provide opportunities to increase organizational effectiveness (Chinman, Imm & Wandersman 2004).

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance (QA) can be described as a management philosophy focused on the continual improvement of products or services based on customer satisfaction (Ahire, Landeros & Golhar, 1995). Quality assurance, or quality improvement, has become a customary component of local and state government agencies (Mears & Butts, 2008), such as police departments (Riley & Brewer, 2009) and health departments (Duffy, McCoy, Moran & Riley, 2010; Joly, Booth, Shaler & Mittal, 2012). The field has identified several formal principles (Powell, 1995; Waldman, 1994): 1) committed leadership; 2) customer determination of quality; 3) broad involvement of stakeholders; 4) measurement and data guided decision- making; 5) focus on process and product improvement; 6) adoption of a systems perspective; and 7) use of formal planning activities to address the process of product improvement.

THE CURRENT PROJECT

The purpose of the current project was to develop and implement a quality assurance process in a local juvenile court. The intervention consisted of providing formal training aimed at improving quality assurance practices of juvenile court personnel. Court personnel participated in a self-paced, online training program centered on quality assurance instruction. The online training program consisted of several modules that provided information necessary to develop a sustainable quality assurance program. The online training program was supplemented with face-to-face consultation provided by consultants from a local university. Consultants and court officials believed that court personnel could increase their capacity to engage in formal quality assurance procedures and, ultimately, improve programming aimed at reducing recidivism rates for youth offenders.

The intervention took place within the juvenile court in a single county. Located in a Midwestern state, Fairfield County had a population of more than 150,000 people (US Census Bureau, 2018). The county population was mostly White (89%), an overwhelming number of whom (92%) were at least high school graduates (US Census Bureau, 2018). The median household income was \$61,473 (US Census Bureau, 2018). The local economy relied on manufacturing and government services as the largest sources of employment. Youth in the county, those 17 years old or younger, made up 24.5% of the population (US Census Bureau,

2018). As indicated in Table I, the quality assurance process employed in the current project consisted of five basic steps: 1) defining programs and understanding program/intervention theory; 2) defining key process and outcome variables; 3) constructing key evaluation questions; 4) developing procedures to collect and manage data sufficient to answer key evaluation questions; and 5) engaging in quality assurance or intervention improvement planning.

Table I. Quality Assurance Process

Steps in the Quality Assurance Process
1. Defining programs and understanding program/intervention theory
2. Defining key process and outcome variables
3. Constructing key evaluation questions
4. Developing procedures to collect and manage data sufficient to answer evaluation questions
5. Engaging in quality assurance/program improvement planning

THE FAIRFIELD COUNTY JUVENILE COURT’S STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

Step 1: Defining Programs and Understanding Program/Intervention Theory

The team working on this project used a formal process to construct a series of logic models representing juvenile court programming. The process of constructing logic models was viewed as a primary mechanism for understanding how programs were intended to work. The Kellogg Foundation (2001, p. III) described a logic model “as a picture of how an organization does its work—the theory and assumptions underlying the program.” Coffman (1999) noted that a logic model illustrates a program’s theory of change or how activities are linked to desired results. Hernandez (2000) advocated for the use of logic models in decision-oriented evaluation. Weiss and Greene (1992) referred to situations in which evaluation generates information that is useful in making decisions about how best to achieve outcomes of programs and other interventions. While the logic model has typically been employed in the context of evaluation, some authors address its use as a planning tool (The Innovation Network, 2010; Taylor-Powell, 2005). It appears that intervention logic allows for precise communication about the purposes and components of a program and the sequencing of activities and accomplishments that support a process that proceeds from planning to data collection to analysis to reflection to action and improvement. This iterative cycle is the core of the quality assurance process.

Logic Model Construction. The team’s process for building logic models was reminiscent of the process described by the Kellogg Foundation (2001). Initially, court personnel were asked to identify each program provided by the court, as programs were addressed one by one. The logic model development process was initiated by asking court personnel to consider the “need” for a specific program. The next phase of the logic model development process focused on describing specific program activities. Court personnel were encouraged to think about programming as a response to the need or needs generated in the previous phase of the process. The third phase

focused on defining anticipated outcomes or results if programming was implemented and functioned as planned. Finally, court personnel were asked to articulate how shorter-term outcomes linked to longer-term impacts and why anticipated outcomes and impacts were worth the investment of community resources.

The process described above proceeded as a facilitated discussion among court personnel. Consultants provided support to participants and asked questions to clarify key points. This approach to constructing logic models resulted in the development of statements of conditions, related to specific processes and desired outcomes. With these statements in hand, consultants strived to create a graphic depiction of each of the court's programs by connecting process statements to outcomes and/or short-term outcomes to long-term outcomes in such a way as to represent assumptions about how the program in question was intended to work. A series of logic models describing court programming were developed based on the procedures described above.

The Initial Program Logic Model. An initial program logic model was produced early in the project by engaging court personnel in a formal session to discuss court programming. At this point, personnel assumed that the court provided several distinct programs including Diversion, Positive Youth Development, Community Control and Probation. The initial model illustrated key processes and outcomes of the Probation program. In this model, youth were assessed, adjudicated and referred to the Probation Department where a case plan was developed. The case plan defined specific activities in which youth were expected to participate with the intention of building social skills. Thus, court personnel defined program accountability in terms of building such skills. It was assumed that other programs, such as Diversion and Positive Youth Development would require separate logic models defining unique activities and results.

The Second Program Logic Model. The model illustrated in Fig. 1 was developed at a later point in time and reflected key insights related to the conceptual basis on which court programs were provided. More specifically, court personnel began to describe services in terms of a single program characterized by differing doses of supervision. These differing doses or levels of supervision were labeled Diversion, Positive Youth Development, Community Control and Probation. Previously, these labels were attached to separate programs. Such insights were developed through a sustained dialogue that incorporated theory and best practices information.

In the model illustrated in Fig. 1, youth experience risk associated with criminal activity and enter programming through one of three pathways: 1) a formal complaint is filed by the prosecutor; 2) self-referral or another entity requests services; or 3) law enforcement issues a curfew violation. Regardless of the pathway through which a youth enters court programming, intervention logic indicates that they undergo formal assessment of social skills, risk factors and protective factors. This assessment focuses on six domains: 1) workforce and independent living; 2) mental health and alcohol and drugs; 3) academics; 4) prosocial behavior; 5) safety and security; and 6) family. Such assessment provides the basis for the development of a formal case plan. As indicated in the model, implementation and management of the case plan is the primary vehicle through which deficits in social skills and protective factors and reduction in risk factors are addressed.

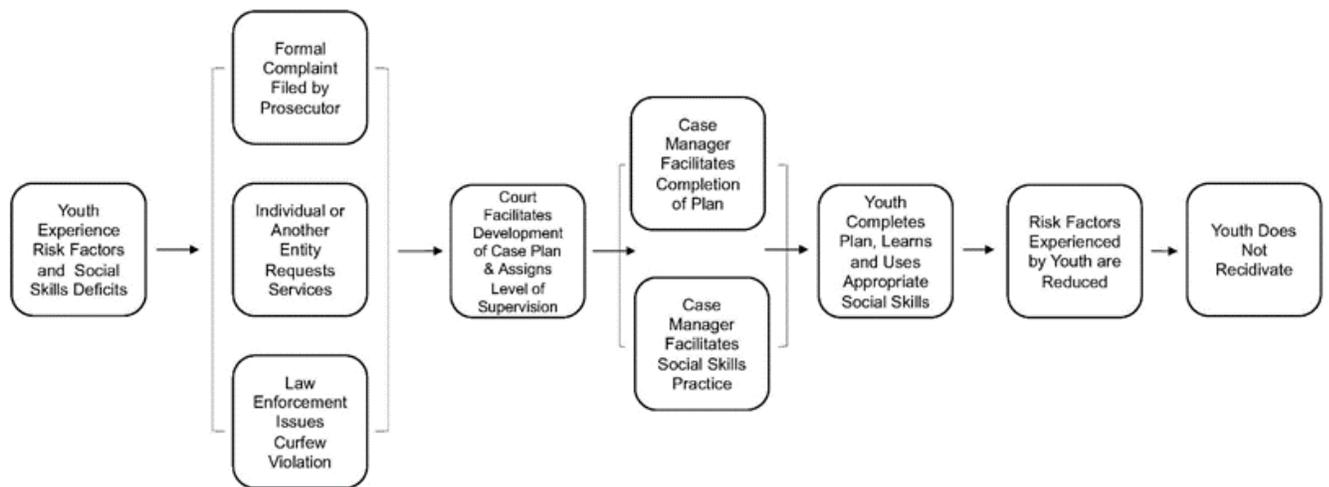


Fig. 1. The court's program logic model.

Implementation and management of the case plan occurs according to the assigned level of supervision: Diversion, Positive Youth Development, Community Control or Probation. To the extent that case management is successful, program theory indicates that youth learn and use social skills and experience enhanced protective factors and reduced risk factors. This, in turn, is thought to be directly related to reduced likelihood that a specific youth recidivates or comes into contact with the court one year from case termination. One year was judged to be an appropriate time frame based on court personnel's experience.

Step 2: Defining Key Process and Outcome Variables

This step in the process focused on defining key processes and outcomes inherent in court programming. Analysis of the model in Fig. 1 provided several key insights related to how court programming was intended to work to promote development of positive social skills, enhanced protective factors and/or diminished risk factors. Thus, the program logic model served as the primary tool for identifying key process and outcome variables. The key mechanism designed to promote development of positive social skills and protective factors and diminished risk factors was referred to as "managing against the case plan." Managing against the case plan was defined in terms of the boxes in the model (see Fig. 1) that reference case management. This insight prompted much discussion as to what occurred through the case management function. Vrouvas (2018) defined case management within the juvenile justice system as a strategy to identify the array of community services best suited to address the issues presented by a juvenile offender. This definition was highly consistent with court personnel's conception of the case managers' role. Thus, for the local juvenile court, case managers promoted compliance with a court-sanctioned plan. Court personnel elected to develop a separate model of the case

management process to better understand how it was intended to be implemented to support youth.

According to the court's case management model, case management is initiated when a youth, in conjunction with a court official, identifies specific goals linked to positive youth development. Goals derive from formal assessment of social skills, risk factors and/or protective factors. Goals are packaged in the form of a case-plan that is endorsed by the youth and her/his family. The plan typically identifies relevant community programs and services that might be employed to achieve youth development goals. The subsequent case management logic model referenced above identifies key process variables inherent in the case management process.

For example, in the court's case management model, a regular schedule of meetings or supervision occurs where the case manager reviews progress and engages youth in problem-solving activities (Lowenkamp, Flores, Holsinger, Makarios & Latessa, 2010). Recall that the intensity of supervision or hours of contact between the case manager and client are dictated by prior assignment to a specific level of supervision (Diversion, Community Control, Positive Youth Development or Probation). The subsequent model also indicates that case managers employ specific techniques to support their interactions with youth. This juvenile court, in particular, promotes the use of a technique referred to as "Effective Practice for Community Supervision" or EPICS (Latassa, Smith, Schweitzer & Labrecque, 2013).

A detailed description of EPICS is beyond the scope of this review. However, developers define EPICS in terms of the use of core correctional principles in their work with offenders (Latassa, Smith, Schweitzer & Labrecque, 2013). This approach enhances a case manager's ability to focus her/his attention on high-risk offenders, treating criminogenic needs and using treatment strategies matched to the offenders' learning style. Criminogenic needs refer to changeable factors associated with criminal activity such as antisocial attitudes, antisocial peer associations, substance abuse, lack of empathy and lack of self-control (Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2005).

Finally, the case management model, indicates that case managers have two additional tools that might be employed to ensure compliance with the case plan: crisis intervention and use of graduated sanctions. Crisis intervention offers immediate, short-term help to youth who experience an event that produces emotional, mental, physical and/or behavioral distress (Aguilera, 1998). Graduated sanctions refer to a series of penalties or interventions that are more and more restrictive (Howell & Lipsey, 2004) and are designed to promote compliance with the case-plan.

Step 3: Constructing Key Evaluation Questions

The models described above provided the opportunity to consider specific questions related to the court's effort to develop a comprehensive database to support quality improvement planning. Key components represented in the program models were converted to questions based on the assumptions implied by the models (Kellogg Foundation, 2001). For example, the initial box in the logic model illustrated in Fig. 1 indicated that youth who come into contact with the court experienced accumulated risk factors associated with criminal behavior. Similarly, the court's models indicated that case managers used evidence-based practices to guide their interactions

with youth. Such statements expressed assumptions about how the court’s programming worked that were easily converted to questions (see Table II).

Table II. Examples of Questions Indicated by Logic Models

Questions Supporting Data Collection	
Do youth who come in contact with the court lack social skills?	To what level of supervision are youth assigned?
What offenses are committed by youth who come into contact with the court?	Are plans developed for program participants? What type of plans? Do families sign-off/support on case plans?
Are youth referred to services? What services?	Do case managers use evidence-based, case management procedures? Do case managers use graduated sanctions? What sanctions?
Do crises occur that require intervention? Do program participants experience crises? Are crises addressed satisfactorily?	Do youth who participate in programming gain social skills?

Step 4: Developing Procedures to Collect and Manage Evaluation Data

The questions indicated in Table II provided the opportunity to design a comprehensive database sufficient to support program improvement planning. Each of the questions indicated in Table II was associated with one or more process and/or outcome variables. Consider the question, “Do youth who participate in programming learn/use social skills?” This question required tracking or measurement of three variables: 1) the youth as indicated by a specific identifier; 2) youth participation in court programs; and 3) youth experience of specific social skills. Of course, measurement of these variables required specification of operational definitions sufficient to interpret data in light of the goals of the quality assurance process. In this phase of activity, the court developed a plan to develop a “dashboard” that included these and other variables that created the opportunity to initiate program improvement planning (Verbert, Duval, Klerkx, Goverts & Santos, 2013).

Step 5: Engaging in Program Improvement Planning

Consultants issued several recommendations relative to continued development of the court’s quality assurance program. First, court personnel were encouraged to meet on a regular basis and frame organizational and program goals. Second, consultants recommended that data relative to outcomes and key process variables be tabulated and reviewed by court personnel as part of the program improvement planning cycle. For example, for a 12 month program cycle, court personnel might have identified the number of program participants who will complete programming and set a target for the number of participants who will achieve key program results (e.g., increased social skills). In this example, measurement of increased social skills established clear results relative to outcome achievement. Court personnel used a state-sanctioned measure to make judgements about gains in social skills. Third, consultants

recommended that court personnel meet to formally address quality assurance issues and consider program improvement opportunities based on conclusions derived from program data.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The process of developing a series of logic models proved to be valuable tools that supported the local court's desire to develop a practical quality assurance process. The development of logic models described previously resulted in critical insights that have the potential to lead to improved court programming. For example, court personnel shifted their conceptual model from a focus on a series of programs referred to as Diversion, Positive Youth Development, Community Control and Probation to a single program. In the single program model, case management was viewed as the essential component linked to desired outcomes and Diversion, Positive Youth Development, Community Control and Probation were viewed as levels of supervision reflecting the dosage of the intervention. This insight, in and of itself, offered the opportunity to begin implementation of a series of program improvement innovations.

In addition, through dialogue and review of program logic, court personnel developed consensus regarding the desired outcome of court programming. In this case, the desired outcome of court interventions focused on building positive social skills. This outcome was highly consistent with current restorative theories related to the potential for juvenile courts to positively intervene in the lives of vulnerable youth. In addition, application of the quality assurance process described above resulted in a common definition of the method thought most appropriate to produce the desired program outcome. Court personnel engaged in a formal process to develop a model reflecting the case management process. Actions to date have created the opportunity to increase consistency in how court personnel, particularly probation officers, are trained and ultimately, how court personnel provide services to program participants.

The procedures described above also provided court personnel with increased capacity to effectively manage court procedures in the effort to achieve individual and aggregate level outcomes. The management process consisted of creating and implementing policies that resulted in the optimal investment of resources to achieve organizational objectives. Managers focused on allocating court resources to build social skills and ultimately reduce incidents of juvenile crime. The data summarized in the court's quality assurance dashboard provided an opportunity to review the extent to which procedures resulted in desired outcomes. Furthermore, the quality assurance process provided a formal mechanism for asking critical questions about programming and engaging in formal and regular goal setting and program improvement planning.

As noted previously, quality assurance can be described as a formal management process focused on the continual improvement of products or services (Ahire, Landros & Golhar, 1995). Experience suggests that many local and state efforts are focused on the measurement and sharing of performance data within juvenile justice systems (Mears & Butts, 2008). However, review of the literature suggests that there is little empirical research related to the development of quality assurance programs in juvenile courts. Kurlychek, Torbet & Bozynski (1999) argue that juvenile courts that are seeking to improve services should be willing to adapt initiatives that

are successful in other jurisdictions and commit to quality assurance practices that are grounded in data. The case study summarized above provides a detailed overview of formal procedures that were utilized to develop and initiate quality assurance procedures in a local juvenile court. These procedures are well-established in the literature and may provide an example to juvenile courts in general. It can be argued that such practices provide the opportunity to shift programming from punitive models to positive youth development ultimately addressing factors underlying the predisposition to actions that increase youths' risk of contact with the juvenile justice system.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David A. Julian: David A. Julian is the Program Director for Community Engagement and Evaluation and Translational Research Scientist at the Center on Education and Training for Employment in the College of Education and Human Ecology at The Ohio State University. His research and practice focuses on translational research and local problem-solving.

Corresponding Author David A. Julian, Ph.D.
CETE, College of Education and Human Ecology
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210

Keli Bussell: Keli Bussell is an Associate at the Center on Education and Training for Employment with expertise in quality assurance and data analysis. Leveraging her Master's in Human Resource Management and education in her doctoral program, she understands the importance of thoughtful identification of measurable data utilized in strategic decision making. She contributed to the logic model development and editing as part of the Fairfield County Juvenile Court project.

Ryan Kapa: Ryan Kapa is a Research Associate at Research for Action in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He received his Ph.D. in Educational Policy from The Ohio State University. His research interests include the impact of school security policies and practices on K-12 students, school discipline, early childhood education and program evaluation.

Alexis Little: Dr. Alexis Patrice Little is a graduate of Ohio State University's Education Policy Ph.D. Program (Class of 2020). Her research focuses on the impact of zero tolerance discipline policies and exclusionary discipline on Black girls' educational experiences in urban high schools. She is committed to collaborative work across academic disciplines and in conjunction with organizations dedicated to social welfare.

Scott Renshaw: Mr. Renshaw is a Data Services Specialist at the Center on Education and Training for Employment in the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University. Mr. Renshaw has a BA in Organizational Communication from Ohio State University and over 15 years of experience in project management, program evaluation, group facilitation and data management and analysis.

Melissa Ross: Dr. Melissa Ross serves as The Ohio State University Center on Education and Training for Employment's Associate Director of Research Partnerships and Impacts and project director for the Community Engagement and Evaluation team. She received her Doctor of Psychology at the Wright State University School of Professional Psychology. Dr. Ross leads efforts to establish and cultivate research partnerships and manages faculty/staff/student

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research. She also serves as the lead operations manager for a variety of capacity building and evaluation projects.

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