

# Creating Better Options For Low-Risk, High Need Youth



Many adolescents who become involved in our nation’s juvenile justice systems pose minimal threat to public safety but come in contact with police due to their troubled backgrounds and life circumstances. Too often, these youth are placed under arrest—and sometimes detained—when a warning, citation, or referral to services would be more constructive.

While youth with serious mental health needs may come through the juvenile justice system door, it is well accepted that the juvenile justice system was not designed and is not well-equipped to meet these service needs. Instead of bringing youth to detention facilities to obtain such services, a key goal of JDAI is to:

- avoid justice system involvement; and
- connect needy youth and families to appropriate and responsive services.

## Promising models to quickly divert low-risk youth

Promising models to quickly divert low-risk youth from the justice system and connect those with significant needs to relevant service providers. Working together law enforcement and other JDAI stakeholders can help address the frustrating gaps that often prevent youth with severe needs from connecting with community service providers following their interactions with law enforcement. The most promising efforts involve:

- **Reception centers** and other locations where lower-risk youth can be diverted from court (or even from arrest), assessed, and—when necessary—connected to nearby services providers; or
- **Well-crafted and service-rich diversion programs** that allow law enforcement officers to connect youth directly to needed support and assistance.

## New strategies for youth involved in domestic disturbances

New strategies to avoid unnecessary arrest and detention of youth involved in domestic disturbances. Local justice systems frequently face a difficult challenge in working with youth who come in contact with law enforcement due to domestic disturbances in their homes. Through JDAI, jurisdictions such as Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio and Pima County (Tucson), Arizona have forged partnerships with law enforcement, the courts, and other agencies to minimize the use of detention (and even arrest) and instead steer youth and their families to local services providers.

## Importance of keeping the process quick and user friendly for patrol officers

Regardless of the model employed—reception center, diversion program, domestic violence alternative—the process must remain simple and straightforward for law enforcement personnel

- **Clear guidelines** as to which youth are eligible and under which circumstances.
- **Minimal paperwork** and an expedited process for officers to connect youth and families to the alternative site or process, and to transfer custody of the youth.
- **Thorough in-service training and regular refresher sessions** for officers to review criteria and procedures for domestic violence cases.