Improving Outcomes for Youth With Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections

Coordinating Aftercare Services

Overview

Youth who receive appropriate aftercare services, including educational supports, immediately after release from a correctional facility are three times as likely to remain lawfully in the community after 12 months.[1] This includes educational record transfers that are accurate, timely, confidential, and complete.[2] Such records transfer must be compliant with relevant State and Federal laws and must contain all Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)–mandated documents in the individualized education program (IEP).[3,4] Aftercare services should be evidence based and include wraparound services, such as school re-enrollment programs, mentoring, the use of transition coordinators, and parental skill development.[5] The best aftercare services should be coordinated with strategic partners to ensure a seamless transition from the facility to the community.[6,7]

Depending on an individual youth's age or level of need, reentry may look different. When a youth exits a correctional facility, he or she may return to his or her home school or a group home setting. Some youth who age out of juvenile settings but have not completed their sentences may be transferred to adult correctional facilities to continue their educational process. In contrast, a youth who has reached the age of majority at the juvenile setting and has completed his or her sentence may return to the community and enter the workforce or postsecondary educational settings. To ensure successful outcomes for youth with disabilities, aftercare services need to be planned for and systematically coordinated. Of the various paths to reentry a youth may take, the coordination of aftercare services is likely to be more effective when managed by the correctional facility. Identifying personnel with knowledge of IDEA requirements and effective transition planning to oversee transition and reentry coordination also should be the responsibility of the correctional facility.

Key Principles of Practice

The following principles were identified in a review of *Successfully Transitioning Youth Who Are Delinquent Between Institutions and Alternative and Community Schools.*[8]

Wraparound Plans Wraparound plans allow the coordination of multiple services to help facilitate successful aftercare services for youth exiting a correctional facility.[9] These plans should specify a youth's needs, including education, housing, counseling, mental health, disabilities, substance use, and employment, as well as the services already in place and to be determined after a youth's release from a correctional facility (e.g., social services and recreational services). Personnel from across the agencies with which a youth is involved (e.g., vocational, rehabilitation, medical, or social services) should be invited to participate in the development and implementation of the wraparound plan. However, a transition coordinator or case manager from the correctional facility who is aware of the youth's goals, as well as his or her reentry path should facilitate the oversight of wraparound plans. For youth who are entering the workforce or postsecondary settings, personnel from those settings should be invited to participate in developing the wraparound plan and support such youth with their reentry. The individual case manager or coordinator from the correctional facility should ensure the following:

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- Family involvement and participation
- Integration and coordination of services across multiple agencies
- Identification of a continuum of community-based services that begin with the least restrictive environment (LRE)
- Strengths-based approaches that consider an individual's unique needs
- Cultural responsiveness

For youth with disabilities, wraparound plans should be connected and aligned with a youth's IEP and individualized transition plan (ITP) that specify educational and vocational goals. In addition, a wraparound plan must document the agreements made regarding the action steps necessary to reach the goals set by youth, their families, and service providers.[10] It is important that the ITP clearly defines roles and responsibilities, with appropriate tasks allocated to specific agency members.[11] To encourage successful outcomes for youth with disabilities, a "no reject no eject policy"[12] is recommended, meaning that wraparound services should be unconditional, not terminated because of a youth's behavior or actions.

Transition Coordination An Arizona State University study found that youth with disabilities who received enhanced transition services, which included the use of transition portfolios, were 64% less likely to recidivate.[13] It is important that a youth's ITP clearly identifies student support services that will be provided to the youth throughout the transition process, as well as who will provide them. As a resource for the youth, the transition team may develop a transition portfolio that may contain the following elements: (1) the IEP, (2) special education rights, (3) completed psychoeducational evaluations, (4) academic assessments, (5) school transcripts, (6) any certificates or diplomas earned by the youth, (7) vocational assessment results, (8) the youth's résumé, (9) a transition resource packet, (10) course credit analysis, (11) the ITP, and (12) work samples.[14] In addition, a representative from the facility, a counselor (or an individual who oversees re-enrollment) from the destination school, the family, community partners, and the youth's parole officer can form a re-enrollment team that coordinates the transition back into regular school.[15,16] In many instances, youth with disabilities experience difficulty re-enrolling in their home schools, especially if that school was the location where an infraction occurred that led to a youth's involvement in the juvenile justice system in the first place. Coordinating transition by involving administrators or related service providers from the home school on the re-enrollment team can help increase the likelihood that youth are re-enrolled in the appropriate educational placement after release, with a plan in place to support success at the home school. For older youth with disabilities who may not be returning to regular school settings, similar teams can be formed that involve community, vocational, and rehabilitation partners. Transition and reentry planning and coordination also should involve parents and families of youth with disabilities in correctional facilities.

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TOPICAL ISSUE BRIEF | Improving Outcomes for Youth With Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections
Coordinating Aftercare Services

Page 2

Endnotes

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TOPICAL ISSUE BRIEF | Improving Outcomes for Youth With Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections
Coordinating Aftercare Services

7180L_09/16

Page 3