

Joe Williams:

Hello and welcome. April is Second Chance Month and we are pleased to bring you this limited series podcast in celebration of second chances. My name is Joe Williams and I'm joined by my co-host, Heather Erwin. We are technical assistance consultants for the American Institutes for Research. AIR works in partnership with the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to run the Youth Reentry Training and Technical Assistance Center, which provides support for grantees awarded Federal Second Chance Act funding. Each week this month, we'll engage an inspiring OJJDP grantee and clients from their program to reflect on different aspects of youth reentry. We hope you come away from these conversations feeling better educated about and inspired by how youth reentry works and why it's important.

In this week's episode of Reflections on Reentry, we're featuring the work of Youth for Change. Youth for Change is dedicated to enhancing the lives of children, individuals, families and communities. They are an inclusive, caring, and resilient agency that works from a set of values that allows for the delivery of trauma-informed, culturally sensitive and client-centered services. Youth for Change was established by George Siler in 1991 as a nonprofit with two group homes in Paradise, California and now serves clients throughout the state, while partnering with other counties and communities when there is a need.

Welcome to this week's episode of our podcast series of Reflections on Reentry for Second Chance Month. My name is Joe Williams, and today we're joined by Sarah and Karen from Youth for Change. So Sarah, would you tell us about your organization and also your Second Chance Reentry Youth Grant?

Sarah Feingold:

I can, Joe. Thanks for having us. My name's Sarah Feingold. I'm the Director at Youth for Change. Youth for Change is a nonprofit agency located in Northern California. We were established in 1991. We've really grown over the last 33 years by building partnerships and developing programs that fill in needs and gaps in the community. We currently provide a diverse array of social services and behavioral health programs across five rural counties, and at any given time we're serving approximately 600 families.

We are grantees of OJJDP. We were awarded in December of 2021. Our concept for this reentry program was really built upon our already established collaboration and partnership with probation. We were addressing a pending closure of California DJJ facilities and the probation department needed to adjust their services. They were anticipating a higher level of need for those that they were serving in juvenile hall. They originally reached out to us based on our partnership we've had for a long time. One of our longest running programs is our Wraparound program and they wanted to utilize some of those concepts, specifically child and family team meetings to provide some cohesiveness and case management planning while the young people were in custody and then as they were released.

The other need we wanted to meet was a funding gap that occurs with our services. We traditionally provide services that are funded through Medi-Cal. And when a young person is in custody, we experience a lockout from being able to be reimbursed for delivering mental health services. So this grant offered us an opportunity to provide some cohesive planning, case management while the young person traveled through in custody, out of custody, being able to continue to meet with the same group of people regardless of where they were in that process. Quickly, we brought Karen Eley on board to talk about the Wraparound program and bring some of those principles to this reentry process. And so I am going to kick it over to Karen to say a little bit more about how our reentry program evolved over time.

Karen Eley:

Hi, my name's Karen. And this was a great opportunity to be able to establish Reentry Wraparound in juvenile hall and take what the principles of Wraparound are and apply that in the juvenile hall process and then with families. One of my favorite things about this is that we can work with caregivers and parents while the youth is still in custody. So we can have meetings at juvenile hall and say, "Hey, family, what do you need in order to make this a smooth transition home?" Maybe the family needs a new apartment or beds or whatever it might be. Or maybe the parents are struggling with their sobriety, which really impacts the youth when they come out. And so we can have the parent partner say, "Hey, let's work on that together." And they can go and attend AA or NA meetings or whatever they might need in order to support the parents, so that when the youth transitions home it's going to be a stable environment.

We can also safety plan, have mediation groups happening, things like that. And then our staff can go in and work with the youth on coping skills, conflict resolution skills, social skills while they're in the hall one-on-one, so that when they transition out they already have had time to practice those skills in a really safe environment, and then they already know the staff. So what we were seeing in Wraparound is I would call them, we'd send a team out, but the staff had no relationship with the youth. And so the youth would just bail out on the staff and either halfway through the session be like, "Oh, I see a friend. We're going to peace out," or whatnot.

But this way the relationship's already there so staff can be able to utilize that when they're outside. We can also work on building resumes, creating TRs. So for the last two youth, they really wanted jobs and one of them needed to secure housing. So we were able to work really closely with juvenile hall and allow for timed release to be able to go out, have resumes, turn in resumes, do interviews, go look at housing and apartments and things like that. And then go back into the juvenile hall to practice what it's going to be like when they've transitioned out.

One of the things that has made, I think, this so successful is our relationship with probation and juvenile hall. We have a really strong relationship. Our probation department has dedicated one probation officer, so we're just all in

communication with one another all the time, which makes it really easy to plan our child and family team meetings. We can opening say, "hey, this youth really struggled on this last release. What are we going to do in order to make it successful the next time?" And then the same with juvenile hall staff, they've dedicated one supervisor to really interact with our team, which again, just really helps make it so the communication is possible.

Heather Erwin: Thanks, Karen. That's wonderful information to share. And thank you, Sarah, for the overview that you provided. Karen, would you be able to talk a little bit about how you incorporate voice and choice of the youth that you serve in your programming?

Karen Eley: Some of the Wraparound principles that we utilize in the reentry program every time is family voice and choice and then strength-based and natural supports and sustainability. Strength-based and family voice and choice were the two hardest principals, I think, for probation and juvenile hall staff to get on board with. But every meeting starts with what are the strengths? What's going well? What's working? And then really utilizing the youth's voice. We encourage them to run the meetings themselves with some practice with the facilitator, but we want them to feel empowered to be able to make those decisions. It can be difficult because we have probation mandates that we have to work with and then we also have juvenile hall rules that we have to work with.

But that's where the collaboration with the juvenile hall and probation staff has come in so handy because they are really trauma-informed and they understand what the end goal is. And so we're able to say, "Hey, it's your choice to be in this program." They're not mandated to be in this program. And so we can constantly remind them of that. "You don't have to be here, but your voice is important and you know yourself the best, so what's going to work for you." And then sustainability is really important as we're looking at them going off into the world. A lot of times the youth that we're working with are turning 18 while in the program or 18 and 19, so the services change for them as they get a little bit older and as they become an adult. So what will that look like as far as sustainability of resources and what they're going to need in the future.

Heather Erwin: That's fantastic. Thank you for that description. We understand that you have a couple of youth in the program that weren't able to join us today for this podcast, but you had some thoughts they wanted to share through you.

Karen Eley: I'll just read a couple of sentences of what they wanted to say today. The Wraparound Reentry Team for Commitment to Success Program is a great avenue for kids who are getting transferred from being in a locked facility back into civilization. Wraparound can help with getting jobs and they help with support of transportation, so you're able to go places that you need to meet your goals. They can also help with counseling if you need to talk to someone, and they're very open-minded and won't push you into topics you don't want to speak about. After all that, they can take you places where you can just relax, eat and talk about whatever is on your mind. Honestly, Wraparound, I would

say is an amazing program to help kids get out of juvenile hall. It helped me a lot to make sure that I had everything that I needed done so that I could start my journey on the right foot."

And then the next youth who's still in the program said, "My overall experience with the Wraparound Reentry Program was very helpful. My experience was also fun and it's always different. The staff that I met have been able to build relationships that were very helpful. For example, Wraparound staff helped me with things like getting a job, transportation and getting my ID. They would also take me to do fun things like go get lunch, play sports and go on walks. I would say one of the reasons that I'm still on track and still doing good is because I had the luxury to have Wraparound in my corner."

The real benefits of the Reentry Wraparound Program that I've seen is that we've had youth that have been in our Wraparound program and services have had to end every time they've gone back into juvenile hall. And that means then services stop and then they might get a new team and we have to start that process all over. With Reentry Wraparound, we can work seamlessly if they re-offend or break probation mandates, need a little reset in the hall, we can continue to work with them and the family and those services stop and then they get the same providers throughout the whole time. And that just really seems to work well for the youth and doesn't put the pressure on them of, oh no, I can't have this service anymore if they were to need to go into juvenile hall for a little bit.

Sarah Feingold:

I wanted to add something along those lines as well. I think the other important part of this is recognizing sometimes we think the therapeutic partners or the social work partners or probation partners that they are coming at this from different lenses and can sometimes feel conflictual or in opposition of each other. And it was very important building on this already existing relationship we have with probation because it allowed us to create a dialogue. Also, just create common terms and definitions around things of what trauma-informed might mean in a therapeutic setting, what trauma-informed might mean in a juvenile hall setting. And allowed us to be able to recognize that we're all aiming for the same goal here, we just come at it from different places.

And once we felt we could be aligned in that way, it made all the difference in the world for us as partners, and for those we're serving. Yeah, that collaboration was just really important. It's allowed us to just build trust over time. And when we're now receiving the positive reports from the probation officers, telling us all the progress they're making versus us trying to convince them that they're making positive progress, they're the ones sending the emails to us, "Hey, look at this positive change." And it's really just been a great shift for all of us to see what's the potential for success.

Joe Williams:

I want to ask you guys just a question about the importance of your case management model. I'm assuming you use an evidence-based case management model?

Karen Eley: Yeah. So we're using the Wraparound model, which has the 10 Wraparound principles. And then a very structured CFT model, which starts with what's working, appreciations, the agenda, when the next meeting is, and tasks. I believe Wraparound is not evidence-based yet, but it is in the process of becoming an evidence-based model. And we also use motivational interviewing techniques during our work with the youth, which is an evidence-based practice as well. So, one of the principles of Wraparound is we're flexible and every family's needs are different. So, we're very individualized. So sometimes we spend more time working with the parents than we do the youth. We're building that relationship with the youth, but our focus is really on the parents or the caregivers of who's coming home. Other times the youth is 18 or 17 and doesn't have anyone to come back to, and it's really all focused on the youth and then building those natural supports on the outside. So, it's a very individualized team approach to figure out what is going to be in the child's best interest or the youth's best interest, and how are they going to be most successful.

Sarah Feingold: I think some of the ways that case management is accomplished is really through that CFT process. Because you're building the case plan, everybody has input, the youth's voice is heard, natural supports are involved. And then there's the accountability of the fact that the whole team is going to get back around a table and talk about where we've gone since the last time we met. And we all have copies of the goals. We all have copies of what we decided we were going to do. And so, there's peer accountability there and brainstorming around what were the challenges that got in the way of us not accomplishing X, Y and Z. So, it's not the traditional case management in that you have a case manager who's keeping track of things and checking things off. It just really is this team approach to case management.

Karen Eley: And it's very flexible. So, we might have something that we think is going to work or the youth decides, "Hey, I really want to go to a community college or to college." And then they start taking some courses and they're like, "Nope, that's not for me." Okay, well let's go back to the drawing board and we're going to come up with a different plan. So, we can be very creative. And it's an ever-evolving process of what the needs are going to be for the youth.

Heather Erwin: Thank you both. We really appreciate your willingness to spend time with us today and to share the wonderful work you're doing, as well as the voices of some of the kids from Youth for Change.

Karen Eley: Well, thank you for having us.

Joe Williams: Thank you for joining us during this Second Chance Month to talk about youth reentry. We'd also like to sincerely thank our guests for sharing their insights and experiences with us today and for the wonderful work they continue to do. We hope you join us for the remaining podcasts in this series. Follow these links if you'd more information on the Second Chance Act and programs funded by the Second Chance Act, and for more history and background on Second Chance

Month, AIR, and how the Department of Justice enables important work supporting reentry success. We'll see you next time.